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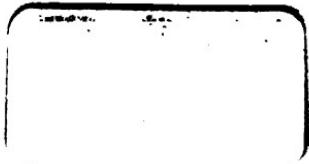
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SESSIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL



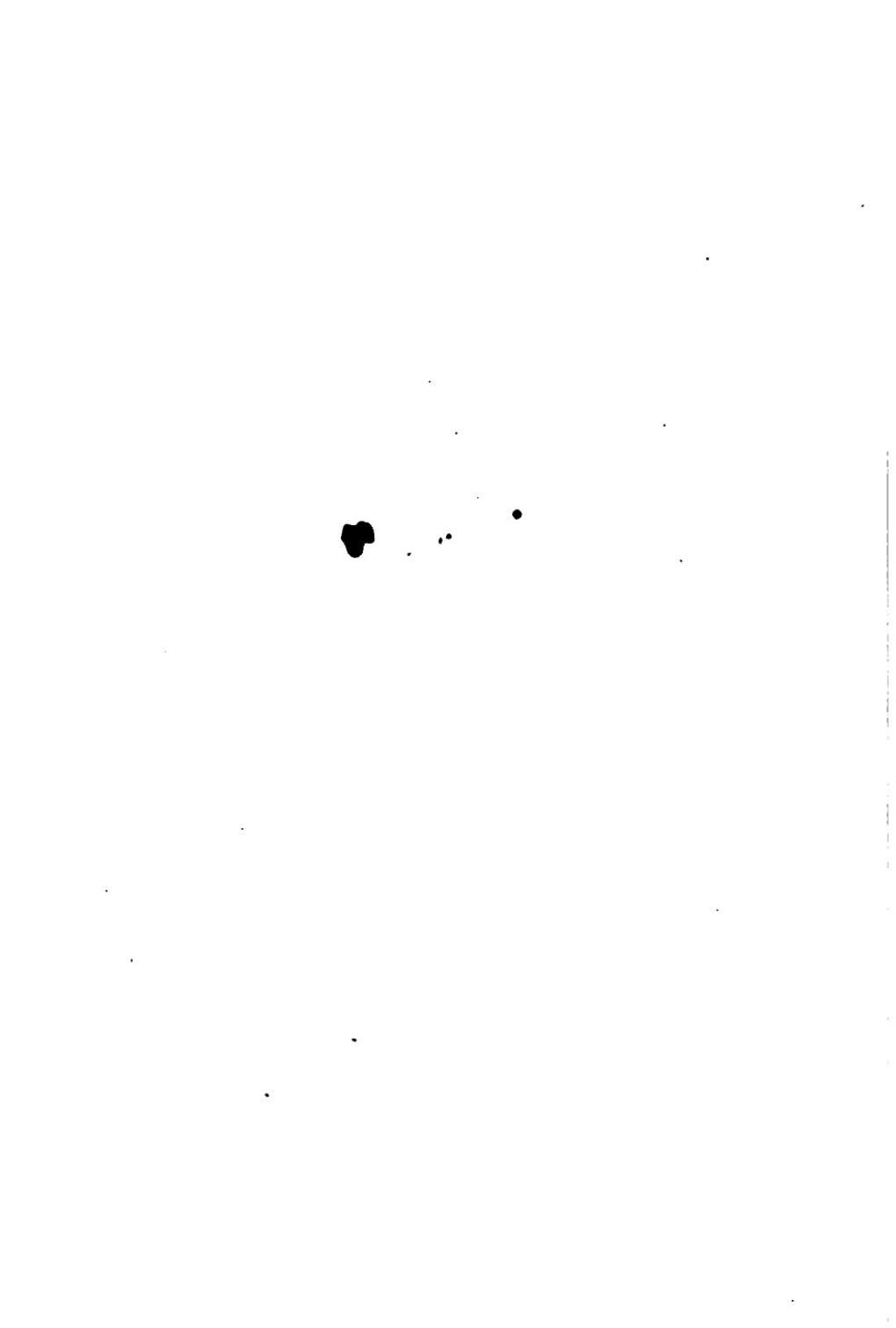
ANNA B. COMSTOCK

KE 3173



Jessie H. Hart

1914



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**CONFessions TO  
A HEATHEN IDOL**

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**"But let me whisper something to you, O Wise One: When a woman  
is married she confesses to no one, not even to a broad-  
minded teak-wood Idol "**

*(See page 351)*

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# CONFESSESSONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

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BY

ANNA BOTSFORD COMSTOCK  
("MARIAN LEE")

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS  
BY FRED ROBINSON AND E. F. HALL



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GARDEN CITY NEW YORK  
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY  
1911

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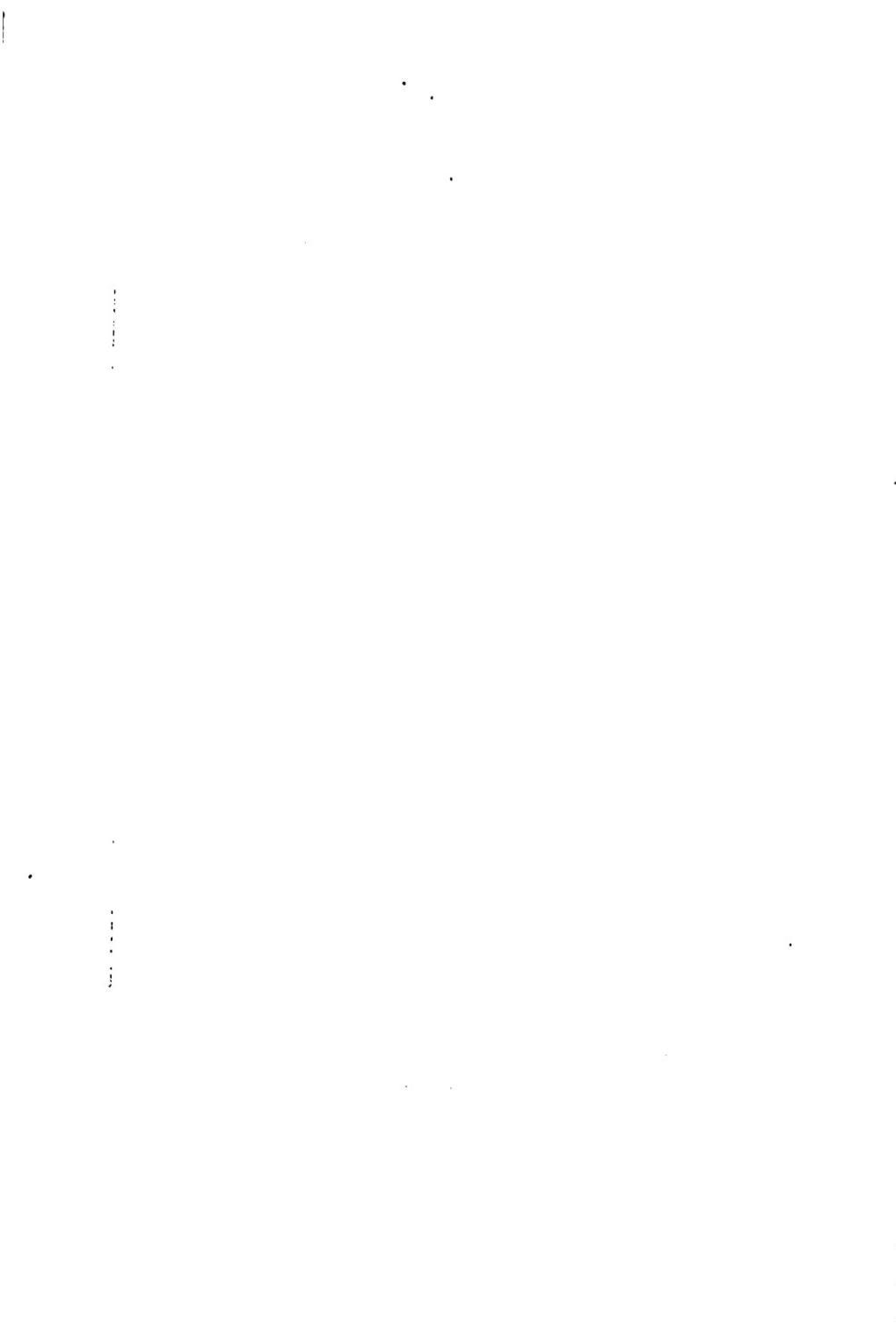
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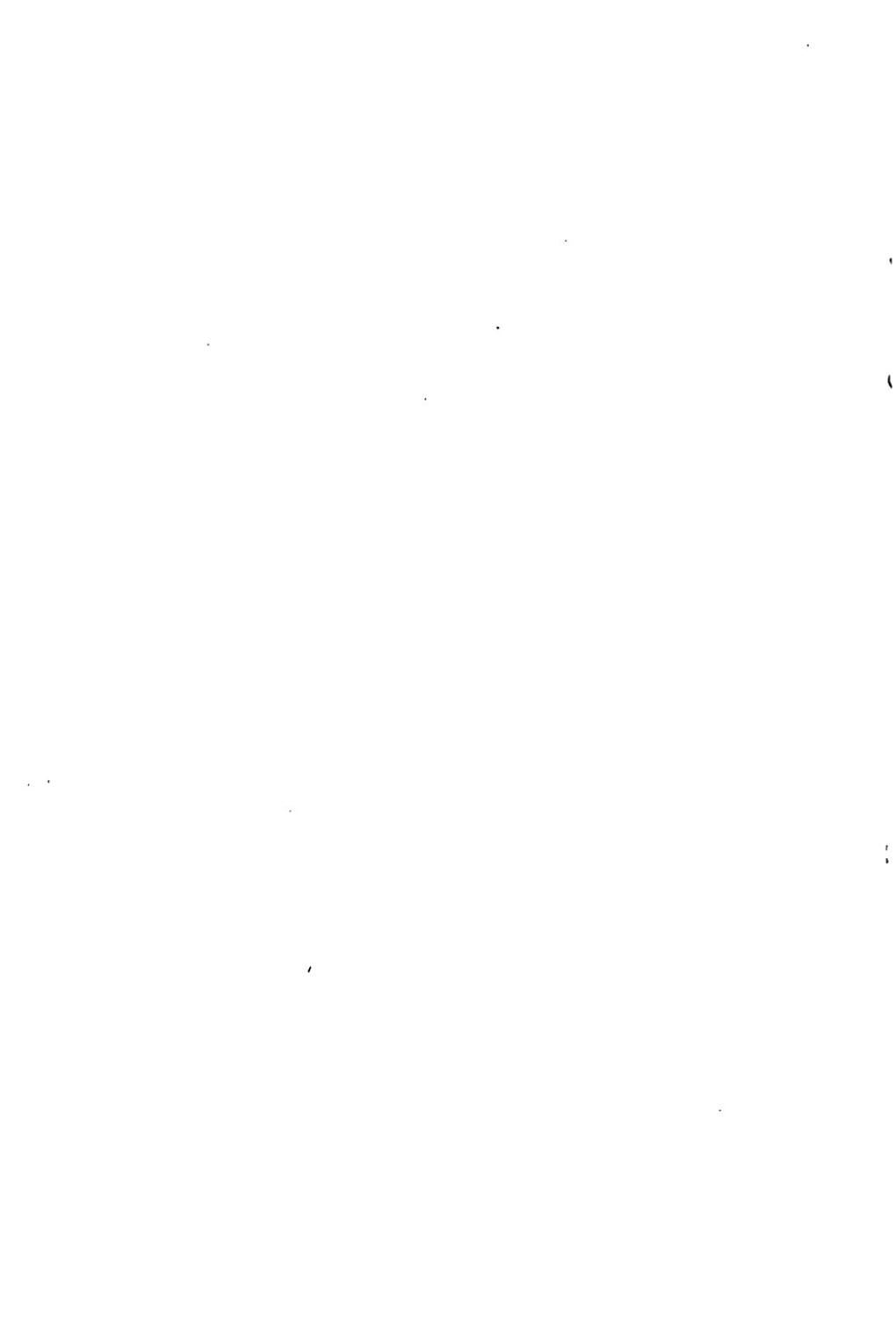
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## PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

**THE IDOL**, carved from teak-wood, and alleged to be the representation of some minor deity from a temple in Japan.

**MARIAN LEE**, a widow of forty, who undertakes to explain her social experiences to the Idol. The marginal notes are supposed by Marian Lee to be the Idol's summaries of her nightly confessions.

**MRS. BELLE LEE**, the mother-in-law of Marian, and fondly called by her "Ma Belle."

**TOM CARROLL**, a lawyer and the loyal friend of Paul Lee, Marian's deceased husband.

**THEODORE MORRIS**, a graduate student, and a special friend of Joe Stillman.

**ROBERT STILLMAN**, the father of Marian Lee, and a professor in a college situated in the town where the scene of the story is laid.

**JOE STILLMAN**, the young brother of Marian Lee, an undergraduate in the college.

**MILLIE VAN TYNE**, a girl friend of Joe Stillman.

**HILDA VINCENT**, a young woman, the intimate friend of Marian Lee.

**GERRITT HOWLAND**, a Quaker preacher and successful worker among the poor of a great city.

**STEPHEN AND SYLVIA SOUTHARD**, twin brother and sister of the mother of Marian Lee, and members of the Society of Friends.



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## *PROLOGUE*

*YOU are so bewitchingly ugly and, withal, so delightfully smug. Your ears are long and ornamental; your eyes are turned upward discreetly and piously; your hair is arranged in neat rows like tiles and your nose is hopelessly retroussé. Your smile is wide, cheerful and full of meaning; your teeth are no respecters of tradition since they are not set opposite, one above the other, but alternate in a most original manner. You are doubled up and squatted on your tiny feet, your hands clasped over your knees in a way that suggests that you are suffering an inward pain—a suggestion belied by your comprehensive smile. You are a fascinating creation in teak-wood, and as you sit enthroned in your temple above my desk, you arouse in me strange thoughts and desires.*

*When my polished and truly gentle friend, Mr. Otsaki, sent you to me from far Japan, he wrote that letter hidden beneath the rug under your feet, and it says:*

*Dear Madam and kind Friend: I to-day send you idol as I promised. I secure him by bad*

## PROLOGUE

*priest who sell worshipped idol for money. I think you like him very much. The priest say he is real idol of good health but I not sure. I have never worship idols because I Shinto; so I cannot tell you more except he is true idol.*

*Please send my kind greetings your honored Father and Brother. Thanking you for your ever kindness to me I am always sincerely and humble*

*your friend*

**K. OTSAKI.**

*P.S. I could get you stone idol but he so heavy I think you like teak-wood him better to send to America*

**K. O.**

*Scant information this about a real god. I do not know even your name or your specialty, and I am glad it is so; for you are my one and only idol and therefore must stand for all things.*

*The more I look at you the more I see to admire. There is good humor and tolerance shining through your ugliness. I detect in you a fair and unsqueamish spirit which leads you to deal with the good and evil of this world simply. Whatever you see you label truthfully; and you will never gnash your misnamed teeth nor tear your tiled hair in horror and wrath if you chance to find wickedness sandwiched in virtue. Such*

## *PROLOGUE*

*a one I have been longing for all my life—someone to judge human experience fairly—someone who neither excuses nor condemns the bad, but calls it by its honest name and lets it go—someone who will not exalt nor disparage the good but will give it its just place in the economy of being. I have longed for a fair and unprejudiced judge of the vicissitudes of human experience and at last have found it in dispassionate teak-wood.*

*But though you are all that I have longed for, I do not intend to worship you, nor say my prayers to you. Your work as a god you left behind you in the land of the lotus and the pine. You will have a different but no less onerous position in your new temple, for you are to be confessor to strictly honest confessions. I shall not come to you for absolution, although I may confess to you many venial sins. If I do tell you of my sins it will be for the sake of hearing them vocalised so that I may judge them for myself. So much of our inner living is vague because it is never chained to judgment by words.*

*Neither have I committed murder nor have I intentionally wronged my fellow-men; it is no weight of sin that impels me to confession. It is simply a desire to walk in the light rather than in the darkness that makes me wish to place*

## PROLOGUE

*before you the difficulties and perplexities of common-place experience—to point out to you the confusing complexity of the straggling threads on the wrong side of monotonous, uneventful daily life. Moreover, O Idol, I desire to whisper to you some of the amusing things which I have discovered all by myself during the interesting days which have made for me my several years.*



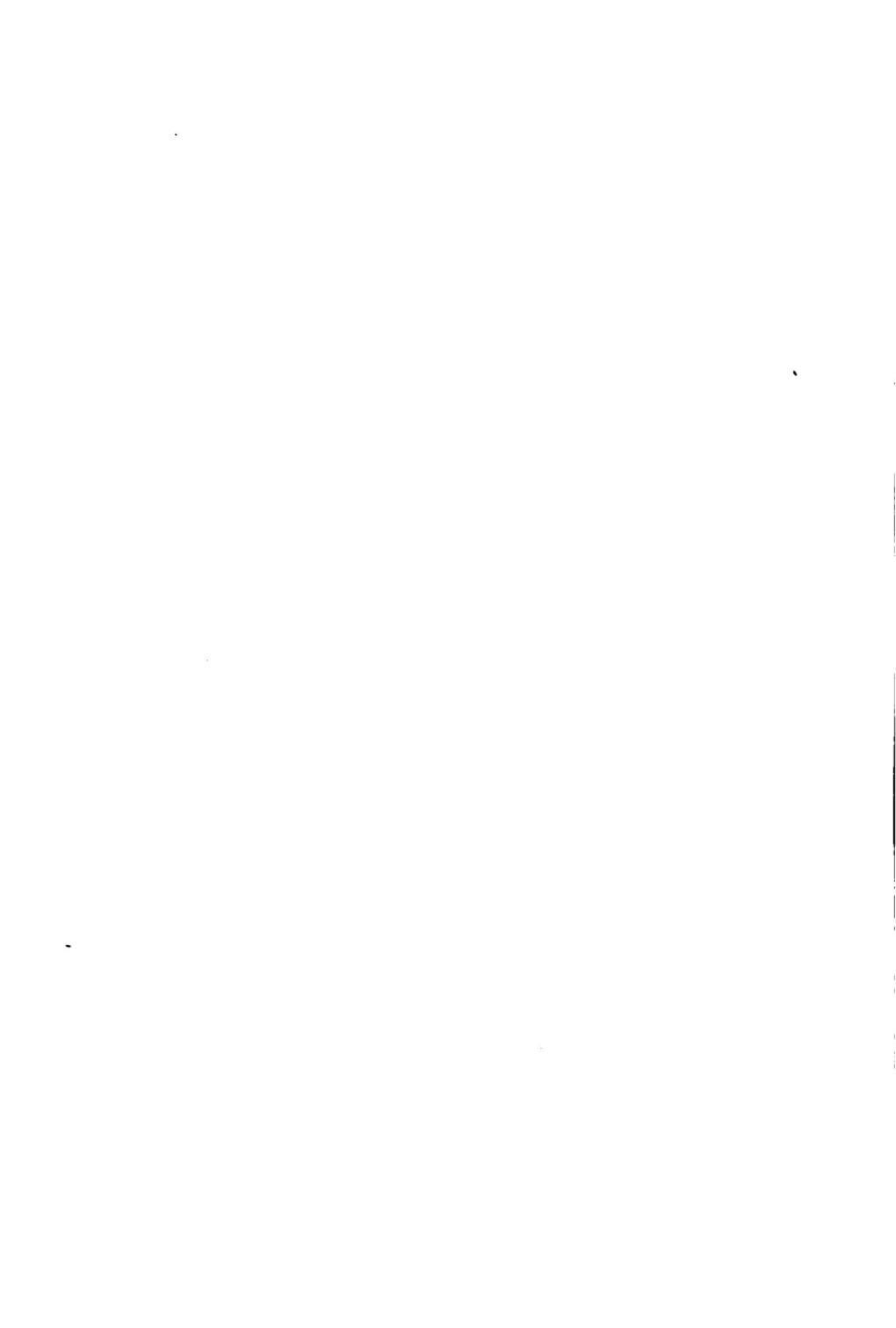
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**CONFessions TO  
A HEATHEN IDOL**

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# CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL



## CHAPTER I

### THE PLEASING AGE OF FORTY

**S**EPTEMBER 1ST :—And finally, at forty, it has come to this—I make confession to heathen gods ! At ten I confided to my most adored girl friend ; at twenty I confided all I knew to my husband and could not understand why he was so bored ; at thirty I confided to no one, for I had discovered many things that were best not mentioned ; at forty I find myself out of deep waters and sporting in the shallows. By the time the first gray hairs are earned, life becomes amusing, and one gayly waves a hand at it instead of wringing both

*With gray  
hair, life  
becomes  
amusing*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

hands tragically because of it. This is the reason I make daily confession to a grinning teak-wood god. What I think is not worthy of serious confession, but must be told to one who smiles as if he understood.

Father remarked to me across the breakfast table this morning :

“Marian, you are getting to be a benign old party.” But Joe took the matter up like the true young knight he is and said :

“Nay, nay ! Marnie may be benign and she often is a party, but old—never.”

I smiled at them both. Father knows that *A year lived  
is a year  
earned* growing old is as comfortable as it is respectable and inevitable. He knows that I look upon a year lived as a year earned ;—and that each year earned means greater treasure of experience and power laid up against time of need. It is only when growing old means cessation of development that it is to be feared. But Joe, in his twentieth year, could hardly understand this, and he would not allow the epithet “old” to be applied to his playmate sister, even if she is twice his age and has been his mother as well. Dear Idol,

## THE PLEASING AGE OF FORTY

it was when I was a widow at twenty-four that I was old; I was then so old that no matter how many years may be added to my life, I can never again be so old. Truth to tell, I am twenty years younger than I was then.

The only bit I'll confess to you this evening of my fortieth birthday is that I have always found it an illuminating experience to be obliged to drink to the dregs the various concoctions I have made for myself, whether they have been of the intoxicating sort or the safer kind;—the lees of the oldest wine, by the way, being no worse than the last insipid mouthful of a lemon-soda. The one who luxuriously sips only the bead of Life's brew gains very little wisdom and small conception of that humorist—Fate. I am glad that I have had what Joe would term “the sand” to drink to the last drop every experience of every day of my life and make no wry face.

I am getting accustomed to “comfy” years and am quite reconciled to becoming uninteresting, just because it is so much

*Lees as a  
moral factor*

*Interested  
versus  
interesting*

## CONFESSESSONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

easier. It is much more worth while to be interested than to be interesting ; and it is more truly youthful also ;—for to be interested is natural, egotistical and delightful ; while to be interesting is unnatural, altruistic and a bore.

SEPTEMBER 15TH :—I may as well confess  
*A perturbing  
caller* to-night in your capacious teak-wood ear  
that the chief event of this day was a call from  
Tom Carroll. Not that Tom calls so seldom,  
as that a call from him is likely to turn out  
such a trying experience that it demands con-  
sideration. He was Paul's dearest friend and  
during our brief four years of married life he  
was almost a member of our household. He  
stood by me stanchly during the hard years  
which followed ; but after a time we some-  
how drifted apart, and have never regained  
the old, familiar footing during these many,  
later years. Since I am confessing, I might  
as well say that this has always hurt me ; but  
it is his own choosing, so how can I help it !

You look vaguely questioning, as if you  
were wondering what this man is like

## THE PLEASING AGE OF FORTY

whose presence invites confession. I fear I can describe him to you but imperfectly. *A man with a nice smile* How shall I begin? He is broad-shouldered, not too tall, and has clean shaven and clear-cut features; he stands straight and looks the world in the face with keen gray eyes. Two of his physical characteristics are striking,—his smile and his hands; in the latter, strength and sensitiveness unite to make that rarest of masculine attractions,—beautiful hands. But how shall I convey to you all the subtlety of his smile! It is a frank smile with the physical advantage of revealing perfect teeth; and yet despite the frankness there is in it a little cynicism; not rank cynicism but tolerant, humorous cynicism, of the sort that comprehends all the world's weaknesses and shams and finds them worth smiling at.

Tom is full of surprises, yet is often tediously disappointing. He is occasionally brusque and arbitrary, yea, almost brutal; I adjust myself patiently to this mood, when he unexpectedly says or does something which lifts him to the level of the truly great; I re-

*An interesting perplexity*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

adjust myself to a properly worshipful attitude, when down he comes with a crash to the hopelessly commonplace. Sometimes we look at each other with understanding and exquisite sympathy ; then, again, he fails utterly to comprehend my standpoint or to make me respect his.

Thus it is that life with Tom in it is anything but monotonous. I have finally concluded that, after all, I am no real personality to him. I am simply Paul's widow—something to look after and care for, but by no means somebody on my own account. Well, I suppose I ought to be grateful, but being grateful is sometimes a rather arid experience. Now don't turn pale, little god, but it is the truth that I would sooner be downright bad than grateful. There is something depressing in the way we have to be good and grateful whether we wish to or not.

We are puny wretches and cowards to the last degree when it comes to standing by nature as opposed to convention. But why do I rebel? Nature is a selfish brute ; and after all, conventionality is a blundering step

## THE PLEASING AGE OF FORTY

toward altruism—an attempt to guide ourselves by rules that give others a clue to our intentions rather than our *desires*.

SEPTEMBER 16TH :—To-night, at Joe's earnest request, I broke my record of twenty years' standing ; I went as a chaperon to a dance given at his fraternity house, an experience I had sedulously avoided heretofore. However, this time I went and sat in divers corners and tried to be interesting to whomsoever the tide of dance-program left stranded on my lonely shore. It was a painful and labored performance at best. I adore boys, and there were among those who sat beside me to-night several whom I might have stalked or baited to conversational capture had they been in the hunting grounds of my own drawing room. But they were hopelessly vapid and restless to-night ; such a blight on social effort is the egotism of youth which devoutly believes that the sight of dizzy dancers is one of the coveted privileges of age. Thank heaven Joe is not a girl ! Henceforth the mamma of the girl of his choice may do his chaperoning.

*Chaperoning,  
a blighting  
occupation*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

The mother of the girl is the natural victim ;  
let the mother of boys be glad for what she is  
spared.

One youth, rather more mature than the  
*A beautiful man, a cumberer of the earth* others, a graduate student Joe says, interested  
me a little. He is very handsome with  
rather delicate features, large brown eyes,  
and thin lips covered by a most correct  
moustache. I found him interesting because  
he was so wofully bored and not because he  
was beautiful—a merely beautiful man being,  
in my opinion, a cumberer of the earth. He  
sat beside me a long time as immobile as your-  
self, my Graven Image, his eyes listlessly fol-  
lowing Millie Van Tyne as she two-stepped  
and blushed and flirted in a delightful and  
wholesome manner. A socially wholesome  
*A wholesome girl-flirt* girl, by the way, is likely to flirt just as a bird  
sings or a flower blossoms ; she does not have  
any designs on the hearts of men, but her high  
spirits and joyousness just froth over into  
flirtsomeness. Well, Sir Indifference sat at  
my side watching Millie and every time I  
made a desperate dash at conversation, he  
answered with all the conventional common-

## THE PLEASING AGE OF FORTY

place of a man come to life from a tailor's fashion plate. In comparison with him the little Bigelow boy, who guilelessly asked me if I did not wish that I were young so that I could dance, was a joy and relief.

SEPTEMBER 17TH:—Perhaps a supreme test of character is shown in our way of dealing with inevitable nuisances. It is always a question how much one ought to endure patiently and then what is wisest to do when one stops enduring. I might as well confess to you to-night, O Smiling Serenity! that we are in the throes of enduring at the present time. My poor, sweet step-mamma's mother is making us a visit; and she is an old lady with nerves that compass her about like a barbed wire fence and lacerate quite incidentally every one in her vicinity.

*Coping with a nuisance, a test of character*

Father has retired to his study and intrenched himself behind a cold in the head and reticence. Joe has suddenly developed a conscientiousness about his college work which keeps him away from the bosom of his family pretty constantly. The servants are

*The efficacy of shining*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

in a state of sullen, sodden revolt. But I shine on unperturbed, simply because I cannot make up mind what to do that will prove more efficacious than shining.

Tom Carroll called to-night and grandma improved the occasion to complain of many things ; she finally capped the climax by insinuating, I do not know how, for Satan surely helps her to innuendo, that he had kept "Marian" waiting too long. But Tom is not one to be crushed by an attack like that and he answered cheerfully :

"I am here, Madam, several times a week ; should Marian want me, all she has to do is to stoop and pick me up." He made me a profound bow and grandma looked triumphant as if she had done me a great favor. When Tom went, I followed him to the door with some vague purpose of apologizing.

"Confound it ! Marian why do you smile and endure it ?" he whispered savagely.

"My smile has become fixed so far as she *The value of a fixed smile* is concerned. I cannot change it even though the muscles do ache."

"All right, keep on being amiable and be

## THE PLEASING AGE OF FORTY

trampled under foot if it suits you," he exclaimed with disgust.

"Oh, don't scold me ! I cannot stand it ;" I cried nervously, and I fear the tears were *An unexpected help* near enough to my voice to dampen it ; and then—and then something happened which had not happened before since Paul lay dead in the house and this man sought to comfort me—he raised my hand to his lips. It was just a touch, not really a kiss. But the world seems a better place now ; and my rasped nerves are all upholstered in velvet and grandma cannot reach them if she does her worst. Such is the help derived from the sympathy of an undemonstrative friend !

SEPTEMBER 18TH :—Wooden Image, do you realize how many of our mortal days we have to live through and how few we are privileged to truly live ! Days when one wishes at dawn that it were sunset because of the unsatisfying hours which must intervene—days of fretful, unexpected duties, that take one away from wholesome living. The unusual duty is almost always exhausting ; I detest the un-

*The unusual  
duty always  
exhausting*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

usual with a perfect detestation which ought to touch a sympathetic chord in your unvarying breast.

I am never so well satisfied with my life as  
*The way to quaff life's brew* when I drink it every day from day-dawn to star-dawn in hearty, thirsty swallows, and find no time to sit and reflect upon the flavor and wonder if another brand had better suited me.

*Wood-carving as a saving influence* I am convinced that productive labor is the best of all our activities to make the day happy and the night satisfied. I have never ceased to be grateful that in those desperate days of my early widowhood I learned to use my hands to some purpose. Wood-carving may not be the highest form of art, but it is one of Art's worthy ministers ; and it has been the saving of me as surely as it has been the shaping of you, small god. I loved the work from the first, and the fact that I really achieved a fair success in it has always been a comfort to me.

A woman is so given to frittering away her energies because of her many interests ! The diversity of her duties lead almost inevitably

## THE PLEASING AGE OF FORTY

to lack of definite purpose and concentration. Tom Carroll helped me to overcome these *feminine frittering* feminine disabilities ; I remember well, he said to me, "Don't be a woman in this one particular, Marian ; just taste the joy of doing something you do not have to do, sufficiently well so that it will be of value in the world's marts." But it happened that no sooner had I really mastered my work than I was called home by the death of my dear little step-mother, and instead of carving wood I was obliged to give my energies to shaping Joe, which has proved a most absorbing occupation.

## CHAPTER II

### JOE AND MA BELLE

**S**EPTEMBER 18TH (*Continued*) :—Of one thing I am entirely convinced : A woman cannot carry on a business successfully and be an efficient mistress of a house and train well a lively boy all simultaneously, unless she hath at her behest many ministers plenipotentiary. My first duties have always been the care of father and Joe and the home. But a thousand times I have thanked God that I had a work which I loved in a work-room away from the house and all its cares. That cosy, chip-littered room of mine in the second story of the carriage house has been a place where I could always find peace and comfort ; and more than all, strength for my duties as daughter, mother and housekeeper. It was the resting place where the collar-galls cooled and healed.

## JOE AND MA BELLE

I would prescribe as a means of preserving sanity and sound nerves to the wives and mothers of the land, that they each have some avocation which may be pursued steadfastly even though intermittently, apart from household duties. Such a work clears the mind and temper of tangles; it is like the shadow of a rock in a weary land. I believe it was the knitting and the spinning and the weaving that enabled our great-grandmothers to bring up such large families with efficiency and serenity; for these old-fashioned occupations have in them the mentally calming influence for which I am pleading.

*A prescription for preserving sanity*

During all these years I have never been so perplexed about Joe nor so worried over housekeeping trials that I have not been able to find forgetfulness and rest when I barred that work-room door and took up my dear tools. Half the worries of life crawl away out of sight, the moment one drops them; and even if one finds them again they seem to have shrunken.

*Drop them, and worries crawl out of sight*

Thanks to this work more than to my wisdom, I have reared Joe in a manner which

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

even grandma declares a success. He is a fine, truthful, manly boy with one clear conception which is ethical in effect, if not inherently so : He takes the consequences of his own unwise acts like a man and a hero. I feel great pride when I note how I have taught him to measure the great world in his own little pint-cup of experience. His college chums aver that he is "level-headed" and I know he is warm hearted ; and what more can a mother ask for in a son if he is warm hearted and level headed !

Thus it is that I do not worry much about Joe, even when I see him leading that silly little Dolly Pease into dim *tête-a-tête* corners as he did at the dance the other night. I asked him the next morning if he thought she appeared to a better advantage in dark places. He laughed at me and answered teasingly :

"Marnie, do you remember what you told me when I broke my arm sliding down the bannister ? You picked me up and sent for the doctor, but you said then gently but firmly what you said every time I complained

## JOE AND MA BELLE

about the pain too loudly afterward: 'Joe, this is what happens to a boy who tries to slide down bannisters when he hasn't grip enough to hold on.' Now, sister, if I have n't grip enough to hold on, I won't whimper, whatever breaks." I laughed and he knew that I understood. There is n't any doubt about it, children come into the world to educate their elders. When I think what my life might have been without the development which the care of Joe has brought to me, I quail before the prospect. Yes, Joe is a comfort, even if he did remark irreverently about you, my Idol, that you look so embryonic that you ought to be kept in a bottle of alcohol.

SEPTEMBER 19TH :—The cricket-heart of September is beating but slowly to-night; the lower temperature cools somewhat the ardor of the little fiddlers in the trees. What are the sounds of supreme content in nature in Japan, my Confessor! Here we have this monotonous cadence of the little white crickets in the trees; the sound of sleepily blinking cows chewing their cuds; the purr of the cat on the

*Nature's  
songs of con-  
tent*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

hearth-rug ; the last peep of the chick as it nestles under the warm feathers of the mother hen ; the soft beat of gentle waves on a sandy beach ; and perhaps the most contented and cosy sound of all is the hushed gurgle of the ice-bound brook.

I feel in sympathy with all contented things to-night, for grandma went home this afternoon ; and thank Providence ! I smiled on her from start to finish. I am constrained to believe also that hidden somewhere in her rag-bag of nerves is a decided fondness for me. Father waxed cheerful at dinner to-night and, laying aside professorial dignity, acted like a boy with Joe. I inadvertently remarked that it was a wonder that a woman so unfit for enjoying life should have lived so long, and father added :

*A new theory  
of the survival  
of the fittest*  
“ Maybe the fit who survive are the unfit who kill off everyone else.” Thus encouraged, Joe spoke up :

“ Grandma is a case of give ‘em fits,” at which I was obliged to assume an air of severity to restrain my naughty boys. But it certainly is strange how a woman with good

## JOE AND MA BELLE

intentions can manage to set all the nerves in her neighborhood on edge! I have always had a theory that she was given morbidly to thinking of the most dreadful thing possible to say in a given situation, and then impulsively blurting it out. I remember when, as a small girl, I went with my mother to Friends' Meeting I found the silence long and oppressive; whereat I was wont to imagine what they all would do if I should jump up on the seat and shout and scream "darn! darn! darn!" this word being my ideal of real profanity. Sometimes it seemed as if I must do this just to see what would happen as the result. Since grandma has been here this time I have come to the conclusion that she talks on the same principle.

*Wicked  
thoughts in  
Friends'  
Meeting*

SEPTEMBER 20TH :—I went this afternoon to see my mamma-in-law. In your country, Mr. Image, the mother-in-law is a great personage; but she is n't to be compared with mine, for mine is the most interesting woman that ever lived in any country. She is beautiful, too, with her white hair, rosy cheeks

*A special kind  
of a mother-  
in-law.*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

and glowing, dark eyes. If there was ever a  
*A "brick"* tonic in human form, she is one ; she makes a  
*defined* funny pretense of being cynical, but she is the  
warmest hearted and most truly helpful per-  
son I know. She is a brick ! Now, of course,  
you poor Heathen, you do not know what  
that term means ; but a brick is—is some-  
body widely satisfactory ; and Ma Belle is a  
brick of gold in time of need, and also in time  
of need she is occasionally a brick-bat. When  
I married her only son and so gained the  
right to call her "mother," I found that I  
could not, for some reason quite inexplicable,  
bring myself to call her so in a natural  
manner. I found instead, that I longed for a  
pet name for her which should be all my own,  
and which I need not share even with Paul.

*Ma Belle* She was christened "Belle" and this name fits  
her perfectly, but of course I could not call  
her that ; so I called her *ma belle* at first be-  
cause she was "my beautiful." Later I  
changed it to Ma Belle because she soon came  
to be my own dear Mother Belle, the wisest  
and most adorable mother in the whole round  
world, and I know she likes to have me call  
her Ma Belle.

## JOE AND MA BELLE

She said to me in discusssing our recent visitor :

“ When the Recording Angel hands over the account of almost any mortal to the great Judge, he may say ‘ Be merciful, for this one is crazy’ ; and the Judge will answer : ‘ Forsooth, every one is crazy, that is no excuse’ ; and he will be right too. Grandma Leech has a mania for disturbing all things that might otherwise be comfortable, and she ought to be punished ; and you, my dear Marian, have a mania for smiling at all things whether the Lord intended them to be smiled at or not, and you ought to be punished too. You might as well wear a painted grin, like a clown.”

“ But Ma Belle,” I interrupted, “ the clown jingles his own bells, so his grin needs to be painted ; but I let other folks do the jingling and therefore I laugh naturally.” At which she smiled and said I was her “ own child ” ; Ma Belle likes to have me talk back.

*Insanity not a valid plea*

*Two different species of smiles.*

## CHAPTER III

### THE ANOMALOUS MR. MORRIS

*Woman's explorations*

*An appallingly polite conversation*

SEPTEMBER 22ND :—Did you ever happen to discover on the other side of the world that the ways of men are amazing strange and that this is the reason why a woman's experience with them is always like a voyage of exploration ? This is true on our side of the world, anyway, and I went to-night on a voyage toward the north pole. That beautiful and correct youth, Mr. Theodore Morris called ; he is the one I mentioned to you after I came home from the dance the other night. This evening he was still worse than before ; he was simply a painted ship on the painted ocean of conversation, so perfectly did he reflect himself in his talk. I do not believe that ever in my life before did I carry on such a stupidly conventional discourse. Neither my mind nor my tongue

## THE ANOMALOUS MR. MORRIS

are fitted to conventional grooves ; but this man is so forceful in his nerveless indifference that he bowled me down the alley of twaddle about weather, opera and lectures as if that were my natural path. While my words pattered along at a decent trot, I was, in my mind, trying to picture his soul ; and I could not even imagine it without that carefully curled moustache. Even if you are made out of teak, you must know, little god, that a soul with a moustache is an anomaly. I can usually see how people's souls look ; the only features really necessary to a soul are eyes, the rest may well be veiled. *Belle-mère's* eyes would pierce all concealments and see things as they are. Tom's keen gray eyes must be quizzical and baffling even if they were the eyes of a soul ; but this man 's eyes, large and beautiful like those of a brunette bisque dollie—his eyes do not belong to a soul nearly so much as does his moustache. Every attempt to see beyond the glass surface of those eyes was a futile search into nothingness. If he comes again, I will surely shock him, if I have to go back to my child-

*A soul with a moustache an anomaly.*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

ish naughtiness and shout "darn" in the midst of one of his formal sentences.

*Beware of woman in introspective mood* **SEPTEMBER 25TH** :—I feel introspective to-night and you had best stop grinning, you cheerful Image, for a woman in an introspective mood is to be shunned, by gods as well as by men. This is one of Fate's ironies, because a woman in introspective mood feels as if she were very, very interesting. Poor Paul! How in my egotistical youth I must have bored him with introspections; I wonder if he knows that, had he lived, his wife might have finally grown into knowledge and understanding, and have been a comfort to him instead of a perplexity.

*Autumn's heraldings* The slow beat of the cricket-oratorio seems to-night like the dying pulse of summer. I walked into the country to-day and I found the golden-rod turned brown except here and there a spray that had hoarded its gold where the frost robber had not found it. The asters looked piteously out of what blue eyes there were left to them. But the maples, ah the maples! My heart beat faster at the sight

## THE ANOMALOUS MR. MORRIS

of their blood-red branches ; there are some colors that one would be willing to die for, and glowing red is one of them. The birds were flocking for their fall migrations and never since spring has the air been so filled with their music ; yet these farewell choruses have a far different sound than the welcome songs of spring ; there is in them an unrest felt but hard to define—it betokens the coming departure and the dread of wearisome journeys.

On a hillside road which leads up to a crowning group of old pines, I was overtaken by Mr. Morris. He was not welcome, but with my usual polite mendacity I proceeded to hide the fact ; he seemed quite inexplicably glad to have found me and strode on at my side. After a time, I realized with great surprise that he was entirely responsive to all of nature's appeals. He did not say much, but he made me perceive that he felt and knew all the little happenings in our environment. His eyes sought mine when a squirrel mockingly cast a chestnut burr in our path, and again when the sweet refrain of a meadow-

*A surprising  
companion of  
the road*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

lark reached our ears ; and when we stopped for breath on the top of the hill, he gazed long at the scene before us and said musingly : “The valleys overflow with this purple haze like goblets filled to the brim ; I wonder if this autumnal splendor intoxicates you as it does me.” There was a new light in his eyes as he said this, but trying to analyze it was like hunting for a star in a cloudy sky.

After I returned home I was obliged to *A punctured conceit* acknowledge to myself that this unwelcome companion had been a help rather than a hindrance to my enjoyment of the walk. And now I am wondering how a being so superficial and mechanical can be so at home with nature. I fear I do not know much about the adjustments of the universe, after all. I get conceited occasionally, but my conceit is as soon punctured as a toy balloon ; and I am quite as content when it is all shriveled as it is to-night as when it is bouncing about tied by the string of my imagination.

O ! you cheerful Heathen, I do not believe that in all your life before, you ever met such an absurd girl. Do not look so amazed, for I

## THE ANOMALOUS MR. MORRIS

mean just what I say—"girl"; as truly a girl as ever I was. I do not wonder that you roll up your mysterious eyes at such a phenomenon: A girl who would not learn to grow old when the gray hairs came creeping into her black locks; a girl who boldly declares the whole world is rose-color because she deliberately chooses to wear pink spectacles; a girl who pillows her head trustfully on the bosom of humanity and maintains that the softness is in the cushion rather than in the head; a girl who prizes more one genuine, healthy, happy emotion than all the wisdom of the ages; a girl stunted in growth by rank optimism and kept in eternal girlhood thereby. I am glad that you finally grin sympathetically, dear Idol, for I need sympathy to-night.

*A growth  
stunted by  
optimism*

SEPTEMBER 26TH:—I am glad that I discovered some time since, that the human heart is the most mysterious of all the organs vouchsafed to man, and most given to unwarranted vagaries, which it is manifestly the head's business to record. I can assure you,

*The vagaries  
of the human  
heart*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

my Confessor, much wisdom is likely to accrue from such anatomical studies.

The outside-y here this evening. Millie and Joe are al-  
*man* ways quarreling ; and I have not yet been able to determine whether it is the quarrel of reciprocal attraction or just natural disagreement. Millie alluded to Mr. Morris as "the outside-y man" which rejoiced me exceedingly as a specific description. But Joe declared it a libel ; and said if she knew him as the boys did, she "would not say such a silly thing," at which Millie teasingly asked if "the boys" wound him up every morning and if he "runs" all day ; or if perchance his "works" were of the eight-day sort. Then Joe, flushing with anger, retorted that men were not built on the plan of women's tongues. Tom's eyes twinkled with amusement as he listened to them but I was troubled and said under my breath,

*The bitter joy  
of misunder-  
standings* "Bad children : I wish they would n't."

"Great Scott! Marian, would you rob friends or lovers of the bitter joy of misunder-

## THE ANOMALOUS MR. MORRIS

standing," he ejaculated in a voice so low  
that only I heard.

OCTOBER 4TH :—A boy's impractical dreams  
are mightily interesting, did you know it? *A boy's  
visions*  
What a pity you were not a boy before you  
were a god,—for then you would know many  
things of which the gods never dream.

I walked with Joe to-night in the starlight ;  
we wandered away to Pine Hill and he opened  
his heart to me with as much freedom as if I  
had been the sister of some other boy instead.  
He has arrived at the Napoleon-on-St. Helena  
age ; he stands apart, in self exile, with folded  
arms and knit brows, looking at the world  
from afar. He resents the bondage of respon-  
sibility and would live alone, stand alone and  
experience alone on his high pedestal of self.

I was sympathetic, but I managed to present  
tactfully the argument that the use of a man  
to the world is measured by his bondage to  
it ;—that standing alone is not strength unless  
it be the useless strength of the obelisk which  
suffices only to bear vain inscriptions until

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

wind and weather efface them ;—that ability to stand alone is petty strength ; while the ability to fit into one's own niche with one's fellow building-stones in the great world-structure, is true strength ;—that the ability to bear the weight of others, stanchly ; and the ability to rest trustfully on one's foundations measure a person's true importance.

He listened thoughtfully ; and when we  
*The eternal verities* reached the brow of the hill I took his face in my hands and turned his eyes so that they looked up, into the unfathomable heavens, and I said to him softly as I caressed his cheek : “The stars up there keep their courses only through bondage to other stars, and the eternal verities of worlds without number are the verities of your life and mine.” When he bade me good-night, he put his arm around my neck and kissed me affectionately ; and that was his response to my sermon.

OCTOBER 5TH :—Good Idol, were you ever complimented in a truly malapropos fashion ! Was your teak complexion ever

## THE ANOMALOUS MR. MORRIS

called "pearly" or your eyes called "starry," or your dumpy body spoken of as "graceful"? I think compliments are really more pleasing when they are undeserved, for they are thus relegated to the realm of the ideal where any delightful fairy story may be true. While if a compliment is deserved, it does not mean so much ; for, after all is said, virtue is its own, and too often alas ! its only reward in this queer world.

*The subtle  
flattery of un-  
deserved com-  
pliments*

All of this discussion was caused by Joe's telling me to-day that Theodore Morris said to him that I was the most elegant and interesting woman he had ever met. "Elegant and interesting" forsooth ! And this is what I am coming to ! If you will be kind enough to excuse me I think I shall proceed to lay my elegant head on my interesting pillow and take a rest.

OCTOBER 6TH :—I think as the years go by we should rejoice over the facility we gain in living ; we get a working knowledge of the tools at our command which is a great help. Now-a-days I feel so sure of myself and

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

so entirely secure and peaceful just because I am "getting used."

In my earlier years of *Sturm und Drang*, I *Bovine serenity* was wont to envy the cow which stood, chewing her cud and gazing with great soft contented eyes into space and perhaps futurity; she seemed to me to be the embodiment of serene faith and satisfaction. Now I envy her no longer—because I am her. Pardon my grammar, O most Worshipful! However, a god prayed to for so many years in Japanese ought not to be disturbed by colloquial English and that fact adds much to the solace derived from coming to you with many and various confessions.

By the way, I was about to tell you that Mr. Morris called to-night just as I was starting to make Ma Belle a visit, and I invited him to go with me. He was silent and apathetic during our stay, but Ma Belle and I did not mind, for we always find plenty of interesting things to talk about. I am pining to know what *ma mère* thinks about the young man; she is keen and never makes mistakes in judging people.

## THE ANOMALOUS MR. MORRIS

OCTOBER 7TH:—Guess what she did say about him! I went to see her to-day purposely to find out her impressions. She said: “My dear, that man is like a sealed porcelain box; you cannot tell by the pretty painting on the outside what is going on inside. Mark me, Marian, the one who breaks through the crust of this conventional Mr. Morris of yours is likely to be surprised.”

*A sealed  
porcelain  
box*

Last evening when the “porcelain box” and I returned from our call, we met Tom Carroll coming out of our house. He refused my invitation to come in and instead, took it for granted that Mr. Morris was going away also, and the two went down the avenue together. To-night Tom called again, and asked quite casually:

“Marian, what might be the name of the gilded youth I found lingering on your door-stone last evening?”

I answered coldly, “You heard his name, you saw him and so you know all I can tell you.” He smiled indulgently and continued teasingly:

“Big girl, are n’t you ashamed not to play

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

fair ! Why don 't you take some one of your size and leave little boys alone ? ”

*Boys vs. Men* “ I prefer little boys ; they are far more interesting than men . ” He raised his eyebrows incredulously and I hastened to say “ One sees in boys so much of promise . ”

“ And in men so little of fulfilment, I suppose you think . ” I looked out of the window with obvious patience and he continued, “ O, you cheerful pessimist ! There is a mighty small chance of reforming you ; the tail to your social kite has always been a string of boys . ”

“ Glory be ! ” I ejaculated ; then I asked with some asperity, “ What have you against boys ? ”

*A beguiling callowness* “ I,—Oh, I have n't any prejudice against boys, nor against pollywogs either, for that matter. What I complain of is that a woman of your age and wisdom should find such apparent satisfaction in callowness. Great Scott ! If I were like you in that particular I 'd be consistent and devote myself to calves. Just think how interesting a calf looks, gazing at you with wide open, unspeculative eyes, his

## THE ANOMALOUS MR. MORRIS

legs spread far apart to secure breadth of base  
as he now and then makes purposeless lunges *Boys vs.  
calves*  
at you, his tail shaking in infantile glee. Picture it, Marian, and confess that a calf is the quintessence of youth and inexperience, and then explain, if you please, why you stop at boys when you might taste the intoxication of calves."

I made no answer but fell back on my smile, which I knew would try him to the limit of *A smile  
en garde* endurance. He once asked me if I set my smile with thumb-screws; and I assured him that I set it despite thumb-screws and several other forms of torture. I smiled to-night because I did not know how to answer him. I have discovered that sometimes an accidental slip of the foot is likely to start a whole landslide, and I make a practice of not precipitating anything that I cannot stay on top of. Healthful habit, that; but it requires discretion and agility.

## CHAPTER IV

### TWO KNIGHTS TO THE RESCUE

*One of the inconveniences of being very bad*

OCTOBER 8TH :—I have been inanely good of late and I hope you have noticed it. Now hold on to your self-control while I confess that when I am stupid I am usually very good. This is n't because goodness is stupid, but somehow in my case it is almost always the direct result of unenterprising stupidity. Well, I am glad to have experienced this good “spell.” I should like to average about medium on the day of judgment so as to keep with the crowd ; and one of the inconveniences of being very bad is that one is obliged to be very good in order to balance the sheet.

*Life, like an ill-fitting boot*

Why should n't I be good ? The world turns its soft side toward me these days, and I should believe it were made of eider-down if it

## TWO KNIGHTS TO THE RESCUE

were not for a sharp edge somewhere, always cutting into my heart. "What sharp edge?" do you ask? Oh, little god, if you ask questions you are no better than a mere mortal; and I will never confess to a cross-examiner, never. If you were made of flesh and blood instead of teak-wood, you would know that the happiest life is like an ill-fitting boot—it is sure to pinch somewhere. I should like to take mine off, for a time, and rest.

It is strange how this power of living comes and goes like tides at flood and ebb. Sometimes every experience is vital, strong, and worth while; then follows a period of dreary listlessness. Happy thought! I wonder if something in your eye suggested it! I will gear my spiritual machinery like that of a tide-mill, and then both ebb and flood shall grind my grists; anything, good or bad shall turn my wheels. I am coming to believe that the kind of force applied to living is neither God's concern nor man's, so long as the results are along the upward trend.

*The vital flood  
and ebb*

OCTOBER 15TH:—A breathlessly busy day,

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

and I am in a state of rebellion to-night  
*To-day's mad* against the mad hurry that possesses this day  
*hurry* and generation as, of old, devils possessed the swine. We are too busy to live, and have to get our experiences by hastily running over a card-catalogue of emotions. We know our joys and agonies by name, but we have no time to reach up and take from the shelf and study a genuine volume of life lore.

To change the metaphor, we have no chance *Telescoped hours and days* to drift and rest. The current is so swift that we are obliged to keep steadily at the oars, drifting in rapids not being a safe pastime. In the land whence you came, Idol, the days are serenely lived hour by hour, and are not telescoped one on another as they are here. In that blessed land the angle of incident is no greater than the angle for reflection. Little god, let us go back there and stay !

All of this tirade comes from an attempt of father's to entertain his class, *en masse*, here at the house this evening ; the preparation for and the event itself have taken all my time and strength for two days.

As an act of kindly intention on the part

## TWO KNIGHTS TO THE RESCUE

of a professor toward his pupils; and as a means of grace to the pupils, I fully approve of the function. But as a social effort it was a weird affair. I cannot think of any gathering, so perfectly amicable, that was farther from social intercourse than the reception this evening. The young people were fine looking, for the most part, and doubtless in a less constrained situation would have been most brilliant in conversation. But there were such hordes of them that they could not find themselves; they seemed to be rooted to their seats during all the earlier part of the evening; whether they were helpless and could not move, or were happy and did not wish to was a problem I could not solve.

Into this *in-statu-quo* company Joe brought Mr. Morris and a little later Tom drifted in. It seemed as if they both discovered my perilous situation as hostess at once and each went to work to help me in his own way. Mr. Morris soon had a group around the piano singing college songs with the joyous abandon characteristic of such singing. Tom went into the library and began talking; and in a

*An immobile  
company*

*Two modern  
knights*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

few moments he had uprooted every person in the room much to the relief of the chairs and myself; Tom is a Pied Piper when he makes up his mind to be entertaining and these students gathered around him and very soon shouts of laughter from the group greeted my grateful ears. Tom is inimitable when he tells funny stories; his expression of countenance is serious, almost grave except for a latent twinkle in his eyes; not until his listeners are laughing and the climax of the story safely passed does his smile show itself; (I think I told you once that his smile is an exceedingly interesting performance to the on-looker).

*The teacher's  
cheerful self-  
immolation*

I had barely strength left to thank these two who came to my rescue so nobly. But when all were gone father said with a look of perfect satisfaction: "I think they all had a most enjoyable evening, don't you think so?" and I was able to say "Surely they did." Dear old dad! he lives for his pupils in a way they can never know. The hero on the battle-field lays down his life in one supreme moment but the true teacher lays down

## TWO KNIGHTS TO THE RESCUE

his life hour after hour, moment after moment; and when the last drop of his blood has been poured on this sacrificial altar of his life's work he is tossed aside by the powers that be, because, forsooth, "younger blood" is needed. But it is I, not father, who says these rebellious things.

OCTOBER 22D:—Tom came this morning early and took me for a drive and it was a *The miracle of the mists* memorable experience. Our road took us for miles along the river's bank, and then led us to the very top of Starrin's mountain. Nature had turned impressionist and splashed the hills with scarlet and wine-color, russet and yellow, olive and emerald. From our mountain top the valleys below seemed filled with morning mists—fog-seas rifted here and there to give us glimpses of a sea-bottom of green pastures and still waters; the sudden parting of these mist-billows seemed to me somewhat more of a miracle than the dividing of the water of the Red Sea in days of old.

I had a deeply satisfactory time with Mother

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

Nature this morning because I was happy ; it is only when I am unhappy that she dis-  
*Nature likes  
good society* owns me, and will have naught of me. I must give myself to her without any reservations if I would experience the blessing of her companionship. Nature is no moralist ; she does not care whether I am good or bad ; all she asks is that I be happy and sympathetic. If I cannot be happy without being good, it is my affair and not hers ; she likes "good society" and is n't inquisitive about the wherefore.

*Masculine  
and feminine  
consciousness* Well, I was "good society" to-day and I knew the wherefore if Nature did n't. Tom did not say much ; his dashing span of colts kept him pretty busy, but I knew his keen glance took in all that was worth seeing. Yet his attitude toward the beautiful world was widely different from that of Mr. Morris. The latter enjoys the color and beauty of autumn as he would a lovely woman—in a more or less sensuous and personal way. Tom always comprehends something beyond the merely beautiful scene ; a barren desert would mean great things to him. And to-day

## TWO KNIGHTS TO THE RESCUE

he was comprehending all things—nature, me, the horses—and yet he was so entirely unconscious of the comprehending! Men, I have noticed, are usually unconscious of everything of importance; and women on the other hand, are usually conscious of everything of no importance. And by these same tokens, to-day, Tom Carroll was a man, and Marian Lee a woman.

## CHAPTER V

### MA BELLE AND TOM DISCUSS THE PROBLEM. NOVEL

OCTOBER 24TH :— This afternoon Ma Belle came to see me and found me in the very good company of Mr. Omar Khayyám (although probably you and your brother gods would deem him lacking in true reverence). Ma Belle asked me at once :

*In Omar discussion*     “ Why are you reading that book to-day ? ”  
“ Oh, because I am trying to find out what I am and who God is ” I answered craftily, knowing that retribution would follow swiftly.

*We must make the best of the scenery*     “ I can tell you what you are this minute—you are a goose. And as to who God may be—that is none of your business, nor mine. It is our business to guide our little shallops adown the stream of the years as best we can and not be fidgeting over

## DISCUSSING THE PROBLEM-NOVEL

where we are going to land or where the river flows to. The scenery may be poor—just low meadows and marshes; but it is our business to make the best of it and the most beautiful of it too; marshes are n't so bad at noon when the dragon-flies are glinting above the reeds, or at sunset when sluggish waters best reflect the sky. As to the Creator, it is impertinent and futile curiosity on your part to be questioning about the way He runs the universe. If you go on like this your thoughts will make a race-track of your mind and gallop around and around on it, never arriving anywhere and wearing you out meanwhile. Turn your questionings out to pasture, my dear, and you will feel much more comfortable and live a healthier life."

*A mental  
race-track not  
a good invest-  
ment*

OCTOBER 30TH :—Another call from Mr. Morris this evening. I do not know why I should discuss his calls with you, Small Idol, when almost every evening the drawing-room is frequented by people far more interesting than he could ever be. There were several others here to-night; someone of them had

*Extreme unc-  
tion*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

been reading Lowell's "Life and Letters," and the conversation turned upon his poetry. Mr. Morris took a volume of Lowell from the shelf in a manner at once certain and purposeful, gave it to me and said "Read to us." I obeyed meekly and read portions of *Under the Willows* and a few of the shorter poems; he then took the book from my hand, turned the leaves rapidly and returned it to me and commanded "Read this." It was *Extreme Unction*, a poem which I was wont to read often in my unserene youth. As I read, something of the old fire was rekindled in me; when I finished, the room was quiet for an embarrassing moment, and then Joe relieved the situation by ejaculating "Gee whiz"; and we all smiled and were grateful for the chance this gave us to get back to the comfortable level of the commonplace.

*A smoulder-ing fire* Later, Mr. Morris quite deliberately seated himself at my side on the sofa and I suddenly felt that I had better have been seated elsewhere. There was a glow smouldering somewhere in his brown glass eyes and he murmured so that no one else could hear, "I knew you

## DISCUSSING THE PROBLEM-NOVEL

would read that poem just as you did"; and somehow, I did not feel like investigating the glow to find out whether it was on or beneath the surface of his eyes; and I did not feel like asking him what he meant, or, what perplexed me more, the possible interest a poem of that character possessed for a painted porcelain box.

'Tis an uncertain world—a regular gambling joint! We cannot even think without staking something on the unknown. All the wisdom concerning humanity which we may attain will never enable us to work out a system whereby we may safely bet on what is hidden in the soul of the next person we happen to meet. Since you are a god I wish you would tell me if you have found there is any certain per-cent in favor of the dealer in this world game? I doubt it!

NOVEMBER 7TH:—Such a delightful evening! I wish that I had taken you in my pocket to-night so that you might have caught for yourself the touch and go of conversation, so impossible to repeat. I went

*This little  
world-game*

*Some good  
reasons for  
celibacy*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

to Ma Belle's to dine and Tom was there ; he was not invited but he has always had the habit of dropping in for dinner whenever he chose. The two are truly devoted to each other ; Tom has given several reasons for his celibate condition, such as "I did not marry when I was a young fool, and now I am waiting until I shall be an old fool," or, "Too many attractive women ; my affections are so scattered that if I should collect and bestow them upon only one woman, there would be twelve basketfuls left over and above what she could possibly use." But the reason he most often gives is that he was born too late to win Madam Lee, and in my heart I have always felt that they were mated in spirit. They fit each other socially, and each leads the other on to saying clever things. Tonight, something was said about the problems of existence, and Tom said :

*A peculiarity  
of some  
problems*

"A true problem is one that has two solutions at least ; and its peculiarity is that whichever way you solve it you wish you had tried the other."

"That is because we never seem to know

## DISCUSSING THE PROBLEM-NOVEL

beforehand which is birth-right and which is pottage, and a mess is all we get out of it; *Birthright or pottage* the true philosopher takes the mess, whatever it may be, and believes it is the best thing in the world," said *Ma Belle*.

"But how dare we be so mendacious with our own consciences!" I demanded.

"A conscience—what is that?" asked Tom with a good simulation of mystification.

"A fakir with whom we eternally haggle, who says to us, do this or that thing and I will give you for it an ounce of peace or a pennyweight of comfort," suavely explained *Belle mère*.  
*Some definitions of consciences*

"It ought to be a strong creative force; but it is mostly a contemptible, irritating, little gad-fly, eternally dodging about to get its sting into the most sensitive spot," continued Tom soberly.

"I know what my conscience is," I admitted ruefully; "it is a headlight misplaced and carried at the rear of my earthly train, by means of which I am always discovering dangers and dreadful pitfalls in the road just passed in apparent safety; and that is what

CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL  
makes my repentance most perfunctory.”  
Tom laughed and said:

“Good girl! I envy you. My conscience works thus: it permits me no comfort from conscious rectitude, and allows no reckless bliss when I finally get the bits in my teeth and speed along the path of forbidden delights; the result is a wide and diversified discomfort.”

“Why don’t you write an ethical novel for the instruction of both the good and the bad?” I hazarded.

“Ethical novels have such a pernicious influence” objected Ma Belle. “Reading one is like wading through the mire for the sake of cleaning one’s soiled skirts at the end.”

“Oh, no!” said Tom, reassuringly, “when *A new kind of ethical novel* I write one it will be most confoundingly ethical. I am willing to admit that such books usually take the sinner by the hand and lead him on to iniquities which he had not before even dreamed of; they find the narrow path by exploiting the broad way first. But my novel is going to get in its work behind the wayfarer; it will be no stumbling-

## DISCUSSING THE PROBLEM-NOVEL

block but a boulder swiftly descending the downward path behind him, and he will have to accelerate his speed to save himself on higher ground. My novel shall clatter along at the erring man's heels at such a rate that he will soon find himself sprinting toward the pearly gates in a way that will surprise even St. Peter, who must have witnessed many a close finish."

"Ethical novels are never read by the bad," explained Ma Belle, "they are read only by *Tomlinson's virtue* the good who long to be bad, but dare not; they are read by the Tomlinsons, of whom we have too many in our very respectable midst."

"I see" said Tom gravely, "you prefer a man to commit murder rather than read about it."

"What I object to," she answered, "is leaving the drama of every-day life and going off and prancing up and down a paper stage."

"How could we, any of us, help prancing up and down with *Sentimental Tommy*?" I *Sentimental Tommy* asked.

"Oh, of course we could not," sighed Ma Belle, "because *Sentimental Tommy* is pranc-

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

ing around inside every one of us ; I find it hard to forgive Barrie for stringing the typical human heart up on a gate post and leaving it there bleeding and struggling. I distrust an author who has so little delicacy in the matter of turning the human soul inside out."

"It was ruthless," agreed Tom, "but most authors now-a-days believe that souls rather than coats should be worn wrong side out, showing seams and motley linings ; and the more they know the less can they be trusted to be decent with their knowledge."

"Some people are so vain," interrupted Ma Belle, "that they look upon everything they discover about folks as something to print—something to put into words in public to make for themselves fame which ought to be shame. While a person who is both wise and kind ignores most of the things he finds out about people—*esprit du corps* demands silence. Such knowledge ought to be promptly stored in our mental garrets, and never brought out even to be dusted, much less to be shown to the neighbors. The more one really knows,

*The wise and kind ignore and are silent*

## DISCUSSING THE PROBLEM-NOVEL

the more sedulously, because of *noblesse oblige*,  
should one refrain from mentioning it."

And thus the evening passed in conversation  
which we three enjoyed. Somebody once said *Three of a kind*  
that we three always think the same thoughts  
and say the same things; but neither Tom  
nor I can keep abreast of Ma Belle, and we  
are always infinitely content to trail along be-  
hind her.

Tom and I came home by the light of the  
stars, which is the most beautiful and mys- *Stars and meteors*  
terious light that shines upon this world; I  
adore the unreality of it. And, too, there is  
something about being consciously in the  
presence of so many worlds, and systems of  
worlds, that makes the ego dwindle to an in-  
finitesimal point, and naught seems of im-  
portance. We have no trouble in bearing  
our burdens when we see self in true perspect-  
ive, as the merest dot on a little world which  
is something less than a dot in the stellar uni-  
verse. A bright meteor shot from zenith to  
horizon, and Tom remarked :

"Serves you right, little star! That's  
what you get for coming too close to another

## **CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL**

star ; you should have shunned such dangerous company and then you might have continued in your cheerful whirl in outer space ! ”

“ Outer darkness,” I murmured, “ I wonder if it found its own streak of light edifying or amusing.”

“ Probably found it warm,” said Tom, as he drew my arm closer within his ; we walked on in silence until we reached the house and bade each other a gentle “ good night.” Some silences are golden, little god !

*Some silences  
are golden*

## CHAPTER VI

### THE VAGARIES OF CUPID

**N**OVEMBER 20TH :—The last time I came to confession the world was all peaches and cream ; but to-night it is all caviare and tobasco sauce. Oh, you poor, innocent, heathen Idol, I never expected to pour into your helpless ears confessions of love affairs—I am not quite so juvenile as that, I hope. I meant simply to tell you in abstract statements or in concrete words what I, and a few other people thought about the creaking mechanism of the social world. But queer things have happened to me, so queer that I must tell them to someone, and none but you are sufficiently discreet to be trusted with such a tale.

*Caviare and  
tobasco sauce*

Mr. Morris invited me to go to the opera with him this evening ; as Joe and Millie Van Tyne were to be of the party, I accepted the invitation, as I always do when Joe's friends

*After the  
opera*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

seek to entertain me. It was late when we returned, for the opera was poor and interminable; so out of the kindness of my heart I asked Mr. Morris to come in and as soon as Joe should join us we would search the larder for some refreshments for the inner man.

Owing to the frugality or the laziness of the *A dark proceeding* new maid, whose personal equation I have not yet mastered, the light in the hall had been turned off. I went for a match and came back groping for the gas jet when my hand accidentally touched the young man's sleeve. In a breathless second, before I could realize what was happening, I was held fast in a pair of athletic arms and kisses were being deposited impartially upon my hair, nose, cheek and lips. I was so stupefied that it seemed an age before I recovered sufficiently to extricate myself. Surprised! Why, if the stiff, straight, carved, oaken chair in the hall had suddenly embraced me, I should not have been more surprised. I was so rigid with amazement that I failed to appreciate how unseemly it was. I mechanically struck a match and lighted the gas, went into the

## THE VAGARIES OF CUPID

drawing-room and turned on the light there before I said or even thought anything. Then I turned and beheld my assailant quite at his ease, leaning his elbow on the mantel and looking intently at the embers in the grate. I finally found my voice and said :

“Mr. Morris, will you kindly explain to me what all this means ?”

“It simply means that I love you,” he replied in a monotone, as cold as if he were reading the words carved in the marble of the mantel. I gasped with astonishment. It was as difficult to connect those cold words with love as it was to connect that frigid man with the anything but frigid kisses which made my face still tingle.

*A well insulated declaration of love*

“Love me,” I cried “why, you might as well love your grandmother !”

*Cupid, a poor calculator*

“I do love her, but not as I love you.” This without a trace of a smile. I made a vigorous effort for self-possession and at last said with a laugh which was half a sob of fright :

“Well, love me if you must, but never, never kiss me again as long as you live !”

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

Then he turned toward me a face still calm except for a flame in either cheek, and a look in his eyes that will never let me call them again "doll's eyes," and said in a low tense voice :

*i quite differ-  
ent sort of  
love affair*

"Oh, I know well enough that you will say it is a wild and foolish infatuation on my part. Maybe it is, but it is what I have been waiting for all these years. I am no boy; I am twenty-eight years old with a business experience behind me after I left college which led me to come here for further technical training ; you have made the mistake of persistently classing me with Joe and the other undergraduates. Moreover, I have had love-affairs before, but they were not like this. You fascinated me from the first night we met at that dance ; you say different things, you feel different things, and you live a more interesting and wider life than any other woman I have ever known ; and I love you, my lady, with all my heart. I am by no means a poor man, and I have no hindering family ties. I may marry when and whom I choose, and by the eternal heavens, Marian

## THE VAGARIES OF CUPID

Lee, I choose to marry you as soon as I can." This last was said with so much force that it seemed a command ; and I was silent, wrestling with several surprising feminine emotions. He continued :

"I know too well that I am not your equal ; you have made good use of the dozen years which lie between us, and I shall never catch up. But I know I can make you happy ; I have always felt it—for I understand you to the last and least of your thoughts and emotions. You would be surprised if you knew how perfectly—how entirely I understand you ; I have never dared to tell you lest you think me unpardonably impertinent. Though you may not love me now, Mrs. Lee, because loving me has been farthest from your thoughts or present considerations, yet you shall learn to love me ! Before God I swear it, you *shall* learn to love me!" He strode over to where I was sitting and, placing his hand on my forehead, he turned my face so that my eyes met his ; what I saw rendered me silent, but there flashed through my mind, "Mark me, Marian, the one who breaks

*A dangerous understanding*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

through the crust of this conventional Mr. Morris of yours is likely to be surprised." After looking at me for a seemingly interminable time, he went back and again leaned upon the mantel. I finally "came to" and managed to falter out :

" But I am pretty nearly old enough to be your mother."

" Fortunately you are not"; was all he replied.

" But it is simply ridiculous in you to wish to marry a woman so much older than yourself."

*Love vs. tomb-stones* " It is not ridiculous for a man to marry the woman he loves best; you will grant that much, will you not? Cupid has never been noted for taking an interest in the respective ages of his victims; his arrow is not a tombstone bearing inscriptions *ætat* 40, *ætat* 28." Having nothing to say to this statement, a silence fell between us which was broken by the sound of Joe's footsteps on the walk ; then he said :

" I shall not press you for an answer. I shall not bore you with protestations ; but I

## THE VAGARIES OF CUPID

shall win you, my lady, in the very teeth of fate, I shall win you."

Joe entered and exclaimed reproachfully, "But Marnie, have n't you anything for us to eat and drink? Theo looks awfully hungry, and I am sure that is what he is waiting for."

"Yes, Joe, obviously that is what I have been waiting for," declared my companion with utter *sang froid*. I do not know what happened after this. The porcelain box kept his cover on, and there was no self-consciousness or embarrassment in his manner; he went away without shaking hands, but with a cool "Thank you, good night."

Now what in the world am I to do, little Wiseacre! Please stop smiling and give me a little sensible advice; this comes too near the real thing to please me. In the first place, I have not the slightest idea of marrying His Lordship, I could not even imagine such a contingency; but don't you dare to tell it to anyone, I may not be able to avoid it if he keeps on at this rate. There is something of *Woman, still a savage*

*The cover off  
the porcelain  
box*

*Too near the  
real thing*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

lized she may appear to the public ; and she thoroughly enjoys the sensation of being clubbed into obedience by the male who sets himself up as her lord and master.

*Emotions on  
dress parade*

Oh, I have had boys in love with me before now ! It is a sign of a good, generous, normal boy to fall in love with a woman old enough so that he knows it is out of the question to marry her. I never worry when a boy falls in love with me, for it is sure to benefit him in the end ; it is a sort of a dress parade for his emotions. He tries to place his affections on me although he knows they do not fit well, pinching here and hanging loosely there ; but he makes me wear them, willy nilly, until some fine day he suddenly discovers some girl whom he knows they were made for. Then he takes them off me at once, without any compunctions about my catching cold, and forthwith puts them on her, and I am the first one he calls on to admire the perfect fit.

*A healthy  
heart-exercise*

It never seemed worth while to worry about any of these boys ; they were only exercising their hearts as a baby exercises and stretches its muscles. The only concern I had

## THE VAGARIES OF CUPID

in the matter was lest I fail in one jot or tittle  
in being the ideal woman ; for, although the  
boy may have longed for my love, yet had I  
given it I would have tumbled off my pedes-  
tal and crushed the youth in the process. All  
that he asked was to worship his goddess un-  
disturbed by any of the facts of the case or by  
any display of human emotions on her part.

*The inconve-  
nience of be-  
ing a goddess*

But this affair is very different ; it is a man  
I have to deal with ; moreover he is a man *Commanding  
vs. pleading*  
with a dangerous way of subduing women-  
folk—he does not ask or plead, he commands.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STORY OF A MARRIED LIFE

**N**OVEMBER 20TH (*Continued*) :—One marriage is all of this kind of experience that I have wished for in one life, little god ; I wonder what you would think about that marriage if I should tell you all that I know about it and all that it taught me ! I wonder how it would seem to put into words the memories and the lessons relating to it which have become shadowy dwellers in the realm of my inner consciousness.

In a way I was a lonely child, for my *A restricted childhood* mother died in my childhood ; and this accounts for much that you find in my nightly whisperings to you. I fell to the lot of a maiden aunt whose path was ever the narrow one of rectitude and propriety. My childhood was restricted, but it was happy enough.

## THE STORY OF A MARRIED LIFE

I was taught to knit and sew and embroider. I was also taught to play the piano after a fashion, though this was considered a radical measure by my Quaker relatives. When I was thirteen I was sent to a young ladies' seminary; while there I became fired with the ambition to go to college, where in due time I spent four happy years. Do you know what a woman's college is, Heathen Idol? It is a place where things are done according to ideals. Any place governed by women of high culture and aspirations is always dominated by feminine ideals, which, by the way, reach about two octaves higher on life's keys than the ideals of the world at large. It was no sinecure, the place of a student in a woman's college; I felt in honor bound to work hard and achieve much, and, above all, to live on the high peaks in the rarefied air of exalted ideas. Yet the years were truly happy, largely because of the congenial companionship I found there as well as the interesting work; they were years of faith in the world and of hallowed belief in man's knightly honor, noble deeds and chaste love—years when the mil-

*Four years in  
a woman's col-  
lege*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Geese and swans* lennium seemed at hand—years when all the geese on the world-pond were graceful swans.

Meantime father had married again, and my step-mother was not of the traditional kind. She was the gentlest, kindest most inefficient little lady who ever undertook to guide a step-child or bring up children of her own ; from the first she leaned on me helplessly when I was at home.

*Plans and ambitions* I was barely nineteen when I graduated from college and returned home filled with zealous ambitions to keep on with certain favorite studies, and at the same time help mamma keep house and care for baby Joe. Thanks to Aunt Emily's early training, I was capable and methodical in household affairs ; and I was really accomplishing what I had planned, to mamma's great delight, when I met Paul.

*A girl's girl* I had never associated much with men or boys ; Aunt Emily had never allowed me to go to a co-educational school in my youth, because she had forsaken the ways of her ancestors and had become a high-church woman. During my vacations with her or at home I

## THE STORY OF A MARRIED LIFE

had little opportunity to meet and become acquainted with members of the opposite sex. Now that I was graduated, a great party was made for me, and at this, my first plunge into the social world, I met Paul. He was handsome enough to be any girl's ideal ; he was a thoroughly healthy, athletic, wholesome young man, with little careless ways in dealing with women which always piqued as well as interested them. From the first he was to me a god straight from Olympus. Through lack of opportunity, I had never had sentimental relations with any man ; and I had always been too sensible to indulge in them with women. Hence, it is little wonder that when the tide once started, it came in a flood and swept all before it. With Paul it was much the same ; we were both wildly in love, and as there was no good reason for waiting, we were married on my twentieth birthday.

*The meeting  
with Paul*

*The high tides  
of love*

Does Your Teak-wood Highness perchance know what marriage is ? In your home temple did those weighed down by marital troubles ever place offerings before you ? I have vague ideas of what marriage is like under

*Marriage a  
compulsory  
education*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

the shadow of Fujiyama; but I have a very definite notion of what it is like in the land of the free and the home of the brave. Here it is a compulsory education, and it is about the only institution we have which can be depended upon to inculcate wisdom and ripen character.

But I had no such idea of marriage when I entered upon that honorable estate. To me, marriage meant bliss unalloyed—the multiplying of the happiness of life into ecstasy, and the dividing of the trials of life into quite infinitesimal fractions. I knew that Paul did not have any faults, and I humbly hoped to eliminate my own through association with him. In fact, I in no wise differed in my views about marriage from any and every other person who marries for love. Luckily, the awakening usually comes gradually; but to a girl who has known only women it brings a terror which can only be realized through experience.

I think I gained the first inkling of the truth through the discovery that Paul always went to sleep when I read to him from

## THE STORY OF A MARRIED LIFE

Browning. Paul was a college man, and I took it for granted that his literary tastes were of the highest character. Our courtship had been so short and breathless that we had evidently never found time to talk of anything so tangible as literature. I naturally expected that our evenings together would be like those I had spent with Miss Murray, Marcia Burton and my other college friends when we gathered for mental refreshment in some cosy room of our dormitory. So obsessed was I with this idea that it took me a long time to realize that Paul was always bored by Browning. As I remember, he never found anything of interest written by that great poet except *Fra Lippo Lippi*, and he explained this exception by saying "The old duffer was so game," as if he felt he must apologize for his singular taste.

In looking back from my present standpoint, I can understand that Paul must have made a like unhappy discovery about me when he patiently tried to initiate me into the mysteries of base-ball and foot-ball. For I unhesitatingly pronounced the one stupid

*The gameness  
of Fra Lippo  
Lippi*

*Base-ball  
stupid and  
foot-ball  
brutal*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

and the other brutal and after a few trials I declined to go with him to witness either. Paul took the matter with masculine philosophy and went cheerfully by himself to see his favorite games ; he regarded my attitude as truly feminine and, therefore, to be tolerated and ignored.

But I took no such comfortable view of his *What a man learns in college* shortcomings. I was crushed by the thought that he whom I worshipped had no tastes in common with mine. I tried to discover what he had studied in college, and what he cared for ; I found his most vivid memories of his college days related to proud records made by the foot-ball team or the crew to both of which he had belonged. Incidentally he seemed to care for discussions of railroads, tariffs, or currency reform or supply and demand of various uninteresting commodities ; his only clear ideas of any historical period seemed to be connected with the making of tariff laws or experiments in inflating currency, which were the parts of history that I had skipped as far as I was allowed to. Secretly, I had always regarded political economy as a

## THE STORY OF A MARRIED LIFE

fertile field for the planting of personal opinions which could never reach the fruition of positive proof; so I had little patience that my hero should care for this weedy harvest.

*An unripe harvest*

My dear Idol, you are a stranger in this western world of progress and woman's triumph; so I will tell you now that there is no Philistine among them all so intolerant and self-centered as the woman educated by and among women; and the reason for this lies in the excess of feminine influence. It is largely because woman is not satisfied with less than knowing all at once. Man plods along in his investigations knowing that he will, at death, have pushed his way only a step or two into the great unknown. Woman is impatient and naturally will study only along those lines where finality seems attainable. And when she teaches, she holds herself strictly to facts and deals only with what she deems known or knowable, and "what she don't know is n't knowledge." Her belief in what she has learned is vital; there is a fierce earnestness in both teacher and pupil that

*Why a woman  
may be a  
Philistine*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Woman would reduce all things to terms of herself* will not admit of anything that may not be learned and expressed with exactness, except in one direction. In religious speculation—in thinking out the unknowable of the soul woman finds a deep satisfaction. But this comes from the same impatient desire to know all—to express the workings of the universe in terms of herself. Having reduced everything in the known world to her own comprehension, she reaches out after the first great cause and the final great results, and, unabashed, proceeds to grasp them in her own little hands. Woman is not a Philistine because of self-conceit; on the contrary she walks with humility along the paths of knowledge. But her standards are fixed and her faith in what she has been taught is literal, unyielding and unwavering.

*Philistine wedded to athletes* Such a Philistine was I; the only women I had known who did not appreciate Browning did not have the temerity to confess it. The only women I had known who cared naught for Shakespeare except when they saw his plays acted by a Booth or Irving were shallow and to be pitied. The only women I had

## THE STORY OF A MARRIED LIFE

known who cared nothing for the music of Richard Wagner were those who made no pretence to either musical taste or knowledge. Yet, here I was married to a man who went to sleep while listening to Browning's greatest poems, who had never read a Shakespeare play in his life, and who openly declared that Gilbert and Sullivan had done infinitely more for music and humanity than the great Wagner.

Yet these differences were only the lesser and superficial ones with which I found myself confronted. The vast difference in the antipodal standpoints of the masculine and the feminine were a source of deeper perplexity to me. One of the beautiful things about my friendship with women was the perfect understanding they accorded me ; when I married I believed that in the man I loved I should always find the same delightful comprehension of myself. During our engagement I believed that I had it ; I looked into Paul's eyes and saw it there ; I touched his hand and the sense of it thrilled me through and through. Little by little the

*The antipodal  
standpoints of  
man and wo-  
man*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

truth dawned upon me that Paul understood me not at all ; and worse than that, his mind was wont to wander to other things when I was trying to explain myself ; he apparently did not care to understand me.

*The difference between man's love and woman's man's love*

And more vital than all was the difference between man's love and woman's love. The conviction finally came to me that what was of the spirit to me was merely of the senses to him ; and in the bitterness of my heart, I came to believe that man's love had for its basis utter selfishness. What would have been the outcome if I had brooded over these things alone and unaided, I do not know. But I had a strong and understanding friend in Paul's mother. She said to me one day rather abruptly :

“Child, don't think that men and women are alike ; they are as different as the poles.”

“I am finding that out,” I answered bitterly. She looked at me keenly and said :

*A reconstruction of ideals necessary*

“Marian, you are on the wrong track ; you are trying to reconstruct your husband to fit your ideals while it would be much more to the point to reconstruct your ideals to fit

## THE STORY OF A MARRIED LIFE

your husband. Change your plan ; study your husband sympathetically ; go over into his territory instead of trying to pull him over into yours. Paul is a good man and has good ability, although he is not very scholarly nor very profound. I know that, for I have watched him carefully from babyhood up ; but you will find that he has good judgment and common sense. You are cleverer than he, and for that reason you should be mistress of the situation. Study your husband, learn his needs and fill them ; and, I assure you, he will be as wax in your hands."

"The one thing that I have beyond all despised is the woman who manages her husband," I exclaimed indignantly, "it is a sordid relation, and I will have none of it."

"Tut, tut," said mamma, "There are two sides to that question ; the management of the woman who works her husband for her own selfish ends may deserve your contempt. But the management of the wife who is wise and unselfish and which has for its end the happiness of her husband and the peace of her home is something very different. There

*The right way  
to manage a  
husband*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Matrimony on  
the gobelink  
plan*

was never yet a happy and harmonious marriage without much management on the part of either husband or wife or both ; and the one who does it the best is the one who wields the most power in the home as well as out of it. You know how the children make gobelinks by placing a drop of ink in a folded paper and then squeezing it into strange figures which are perfectly symmetrical when the paper is unfolded ? Well, a successful marriage does not require that the two parties become exactly alike as are the two halves of a gobelink. You must be careful, Marian, you are building your hurts into a precipice which, all too soon, neither you nor Paul will be able to scale."

"Paul does not and never can understand me," I cried ; and she answered with deep meaning :

*The wise wo-  
man does not  
wish to be too  
well under-  
stood*

"Ah, my dear, you would be most uncomfortable if he did. That you could wish it shows your profound ignorance of men ; for the woman who really knows men, would not for worlds have herself translated over into the masculine understanding. Be thankful

## THE STORY OF A MARRIED LIFE

that your husband does not understand you and never will. But are you sure that you are trying to understand Paul ? You can never do it from your own pinnacle. Come down, my dear, to the masculine level and begin like a child to learn your lesson."

She came over to me and gave me one of her rare kisses and then said : " Forgive my lecture, child, but the test of character lies in accepting and making the best of that which *IS*, and not in wearing one's self out against its immutability." She took my hand tenderly in hers and continued with a smile. " When little girls who love dolls see a baby they are wont to regard it as a real live dolly, and never for a moment realize that their doll is an imitation baby. Study your real, little girl, and see if your ideal has even the virtue of being a good imitation."

There is no person so helpful to a wife as a wise, sympathetic mother-in-law. I pondered long on her words. The *Is* of my life seemed to be utter ruin of ideals and happiness ; if there was any way to make " the best of it " I was willing to try.

*Which is real  
and which is  
imitation?*

*A wise moth-  
er-in-law, a  
wife's best  
friend*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Man's primitiveness, a stumbling block to women* What at first amazes and then thwarts a woman in her attempt to understand a man is that he is so primitive and simple, while she is so complex and intricate. This is quite as much of an obstacle to woman's understanding of man as to man's understanding of woman.

*Base-ball vs. Browning* I followed mamma's advice; since Paul would not listen when I read Browning, I sought assiduously to find something to which he would listen with interest and pleasure. I discovered that he responded to *Short Sixes* and to *Soldiers Three*, and, to my surprise, I found wholesome happiness for myself in such reading. Since he repudiated Wagner, I played for him gay bits from Rubinstein and movements from the lighter operas. I earnestly put my well trained intellect to fathoming the mysteries of base-ball; and I steeled my sensibilities until I could witness without flinching, gladiatorial combats between gigantic elevens. I secretly began reading Adams and Mill until I finally began to comprehend something of the principles of political economy, and could listen intelligently

## THE STORY OF A MARRIED LIFE

while Paul elucidated his views on various phases of this great science. I did all of these things half-heartedly and solely because I believed mamma to be a very wise woman. But the results proved so gratifying that I was inspirited and mightily encouraged. Paul responded quickly to my new attitude; he was merry and truly happy in our home, and never again evinced restlessness when we spent evenings by ourselves.

Then came to me what must always be the supreme experience of woman's life—that of motherhood. Perhaps of all the revelations that it brought to me the most precious was the true meaning of man's love. Paul was uplifted by the consciousness of the little life dependent upon him, and his tenderness and care for me were unbounded. When at last, he held our little daughter in his arms, I felt that again he embodied my ideal of manhood. The months which followed were the happiest of my life. Together we watched the entrancing baby ways with adoring eyes; and the astonishing growth of baby intelligence with the rapturous sense of possession.

*Learning to  
Listen*

*Motherhood  
the supreme  
experience of  
woman*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

Then came the days of despair when she sickened.

Dear Idol, sometime in your far away temple, a mother has stood before you mute with the despair that filled her breast when she gazed into the dull eyes of her sick baby! Though she belonged to another race and another land, the feeling was the same,—for it is ever the same when death claims the first-born.

With the agony of grief, came to me the full realization of my utter dependence upon Paul's love. He was stronger than I; and for all my spiritual aspirations, his vision was clearer and his faith more firm than mine. Then came the second blow, a thousand times more terrible than the first.

It was not of death that I meant to tell you ;  
*The Suttee of all lands* I meant only to say that as life threw wide open the door to the happiness and growth of motherhood, it was closed and I was thrust back. As I was laboriously overcoming my selfishness and righting my ill-formed ideals, and saw before me the development and

## THE STORY OF A MARRIED LIFE

larger opportunities of wifehood, the black portal was again lowered before me and I must turn back alone. You did not come from the land of the suttee, yet I fancy that rite is not essentially different from the inner experience of any widow in any land who has fathomed the depths of a husband's tenderness and has learned to depend upon his love.

Some there be who are privileged to mourn as they long to mourn, yet who shall say that it is loyal to the dead or best for the living ! *The potent key of grief*  
Grief and loss are mystic keys, and they may lock us each in a lonely cell, or they may unlock the gates that lead to a larger activity. One or the other *must* happen, since nothing can ever be again as it was before.

Almost immediately, I was called home by the illness of my step-mother, and again was to encounter the dread mystery of death. I had no time for thought under the duties which fell upon my unused but willing shoulders. I went through the days unfalteringly, and all I knew was that I ached. The ego

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

was submerged in a dim sub-consciousness of pain and the days were too short for the work I had to do. There are some periods in life when one is grateful for the lash in the hand of Duty ; one welcomes the blows since they serve to hurry one on through the hours, until night and sleep of exhaustion shut the door behind a day full of ignored memories.

Only a brief four years had elapsed since I left that home a bride, and again I was in it with the necessity upon me of giving constant care to my delicate baby brother and what of cheer was possible to my bereaved father. As I look back, I cannot remember how those first years were lived. I went on talking with people and being friends with people, kissing those I loved and helping those dependent upon me—but there was nothing of all this that was real. Acts are only real when we do them wholly and heartily ; something was gone out of me so that I could not give myself entirely

*The automa-*  
*ton* to any one or anything—I was an automaton. I stopped suffering because my powers for suffering seemed so utterly inadequate. I did not worry because I had lost the power of

## **THE STORY OF A MARRIED LIFE**

worrying. I was not serene, I was simply stony.

After all this, do you think I am likely to marry again? To take upon myself new and vital problems to solve at the expense of well earned serenity and arduously attained happiness? Verily, I say you nay.

## CHAPTER VIII

MUSINGS CONCERNING SECOND MARRIAGES.  
HILDA

*Disconcerting roses* NOVEMBER 21ST:— You look wearily out of your upturned eyes to-night, you poor dear, and I fear that your rôle as confessor is becoming onerous ; but you must really continue to listen. This morning there came for me a half bushel of Jacqueminot roses, superb flowers, and I tried to arrange them in the drawing room ; but they would not disport themselves gracefully and I was as awkward in placing them as I am in placing their giver. All day I have been in a maze of bewilderment that I did not say to that man last night, “ I shall never, never love you and I shall never, never marry you, and that ends the matter.” I think the reason I did not say it was because I felt it would not make the

## SECOND MARRIAGES. HILDA

slightest impression upon him. I felt like a helpless baby last night and I have felt like a "fool" all day.

After all, youth is the only safe period for being a fool. Then, it is somehow a serious business; it may be tragic; it is always dramatic and there is always present the blessed unusedness which makes one wonder if any one had ever been such a fool before. But as the years go by the dramatic phase vanishes, and being a fool is simply—being one. There is an uninteresting and arid quality in the experience that is not exhilarating; and when one is two kinds of a fool, as I am this minute, the situation is, to say the least, not amusing. As age comes creeping on, there is only one reflection that, in the least, mitigates folly, and that is the beautiful inevitability of it; it makes one wonder if, after all, being a fool at times is not an integral part of the great scheme of things.

Your Teak-wood Prescience has, I suppose, divined the two phases of my present folly. What do you think of a woman who cares for a man when she has not been invited to,

*Youth the preferred period for folly*

*Being a fool a part of the great scheme of things*

*The fascination of brinks*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

and then marries a man she does not care for, because she is invited to? I note that you are turning pale at the contemplation of such a spectacle. Yet, do you really believe such things of me? Perhaps I am only on the brink; being on the brink of a wild and foolish action is quite as fascinating and dangerous as hanging over the brink of a chasm, and gazing at the swirling waters below.

Nay, Confessor, do not frown! I still stand by my creed that a second marriage is a sign that the gods fail utterly to inculcate wisdom in the human species through experience. If one has experienced one happy marriage, then one should thank heaven and be satisfied; while if the marriage was unhappy, then one surely ought to thank heaven that it is over, and rest satisfied. The only excuse for second marriage seems to be based on that primal act of Noah's which sent all the creatures into the ark two by two. Please do not look so sleepy, I am not going to keep you awake until 2 A. M. as I did last night, for I am sleepy, myself, sir.

*The culpability of old Noah*

## SECOND MARRIAGES. HILDA

NOVEMBER 22D :—Do you feel pleasant this evening? I hope so, for I feel particularly pleasant and complacent.

Mr. Morris called this afternoon and my heart was flint; nay, more, it was a polished brass ball, and when he attempted to make an impression upon it he saw simply his own distorted visage looking back at him. I attained this condition of polished safety by beginning my day with calling things by their right names; and when I call things by their right names, it is my equivalent for direct and forceful profanity.

*A heart hard enough to take a polish.*

NOVEMBER 23D :—Has it ever occurred to your oriental mind that I seem to be acquainted with very few people? Don't be misled! I have so many people around me all the time that I give myself the luxury of ignoring them when I talk to you. I meant to confess mere abstractions to you and leave out people entirely; but it has not seemed practical to do this in every case. As a matter of fact my chief fault is that I give

*A social lunch-counter*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

too much of my life away, and to too many people, I suspect. I often feel as if I were a sort of social lunch-counter, always so crowded that no one ever gets a square meal from it. Friends ought really to be an avocation instead of a steady occupation.

NOVEMBER 24TH :—I am going to introduce *Hilda* you to another person to-night—my beautiful, my most interesting, my dearest Hilda. She has been across the seas six months, and now she is coming home, and her world rejoices. I have always felt that though you were a god, yet being a wooden one there was hardly enough of you to go around if I divided you among all of my valued friends. Therefore I have been careful as to which ones were permitted to enter your temple ; but for your own enjoyment, I must tell you of Hildegarde, mine own friend.

When one woman calls another “dearest friend” “Dearest friend” an elastic term she may mean any one of several things. She may mean by this term, her sentimental affinity—the one towards whom she reaches with every emotion ; or she may

## SECOND MARRIAGES. HILDA

mean anybody at all, for it is an expression that may be likened to a rubber band—what it includes depends on how thin it is stretched. My dearest friend is not my affinity, for I have never had an affinity since I was in boarding school. In fact, Hilda and I seldom see things alike or like the same things, though we are usually interested in the same people. Hilda is the cleverest and most interesting woman in the world, except Ma Belle. She is years younger than I, but she is so clever that this does not matter. Her judgment is so excellent, and she sees so clearly the relation of things that she might almost be a man, were it not that she is the most womanly of women. She is fair to look upon, but her appearance is misleading; her face is childishly round, and her eyes are large and heavenly blue with the innocent expression so often characteristic of near-sighted eyes. Her cheeks are pink and her hair is pale, soft, brown, almost golden. She looks out of her big blue eyes upon the world with the apparent artlessness of a babe; and when she opens her pretty lips, one expects that gentle, sugary

*A man's judgment and a woman's heart*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

remarks will fall therefrom. Never was a greater mistake! She can be and often is keen, incisive and ruthless in her conversation anent both things and people. Tom said of her once, "I fear not the wrath of God nor the tongues of men, but I quail before the tongue of Hildegarde Vincent." Not that she is cruel at heart, perish the thought! But she has such a keen wit that her repartee is like lightning—it illuminates fiercely and is likely to strike almost anywhere. She is a most highly cultured young person also; she seems to have imbibed the classics from babyhood, and I have always had a theory that she only needed to wait until she had cut her teeth to converse fluently in Greek. Her literary tastes are so superior to my own that if she were not as modest as she is learned, she would make me feel that I am very crude, indeed. She loves music, and she plays the piano because she loves to and not because she has any ambition to become an artist. Therefore, she plays exquisitely and with an informing spirit.

Hilda and I have spent many happy hours

## SECOND MARRIAGES. HILDA

together talking over the things that are worth while, but we are never sentimental. *Hilda's  
lovers*  
No one could be sentimental with Hilda, not even her lovers. Hilda does not take much interest in her lovers ; I am usually the one who is obliged to take interest in them. Many is the one I have had to gently but firmly refuse vicariously, before he gathered courage to ask and get his *congé* at first hand.

I reproach Hilda with her heartlessness ; and then she declares that the young men are in love with me instead and accuses me of being a matchmaker. This last imputation I resent deeply. I would sooner be a dispenser of cold poison to a guileless populace, than to help to construct bonds which are as likely to chafe to the bone as to tether the wearers in flowery fields of joy. When once I indignantly repudiated the accusation she looked at me quizzically and said with great show of candor, "Why no, Marian, you are really no matchmaker, but are responsible for much falling in love. But you cannot help it ; you are a stimulating atmosphere, like the springtime ; such emotions just naturally grow and *A springtime  
influence*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

flourish in your mere presence," and this is all the satisfaction I got for my rebellion. Hilda and I often discuss matters with a great deal of heat, for she has a fine spirit and plenty of temper; but she is generous and infinitely sympathetic and her friends find her altogether adorable.

NOVEMBER 25TH :—Did your High Mightiness *Receptions* ever attend a reception? Judging by the cut *and the fixed smile* of your coat, I should think not; but judging by your fixed smile despite inner pangs I should say you might have had a long experience in receptions. I am just home from one with the babel of voices still ringing in my ears, and my head is dizzy with the gleam of bare shoulders, glittering pompons and whole cemeteries of tomb-stone shirt-fronts. When I see so many men in dress suits, I always wish that I could paint that wide expanse of *Genre shirt-dosoms* with some *genre* picture which should represent the man behind it; for instance, I would paint on Theodore Morris' immaculate plaque a serpent and a dove. He evidently felt and rebelled against my flintiness

## SECOND MARRIAGES. HILDA

and to-night he did not even try to see his reflection in the polished brass ball, but instead saw himself reflected from a pair of saucy blue eyes ; and he must have found it most satisfactory, judging by the time he devoted to this productive industry. I saw it all with entire placidity. One is grateful for the wisdom of years, sometimes ; I will never be driven to any action by jealousy. Jealousy is not love any more than the head-light is the engine ; yet many have mistaken the one for the other and then have wondered why the train matrimonial did not move when hitched to it.

*Jealousy the  
head-light but  
not the engine*

As I was saying good night to my hostess, I saw the "porcelain box" coming towards me ; he not only came but took calm possession of me, escorted me to the cloak room, and then tucked me carefully into the carriage with his usual indifferent assurance.

Oh, I am so tired ! It is rather hard to have lived so long that one's geese and one's swans are all geese alike. Perhaps wisdom and experience are meant to give one a higher appreciation of geese rather than depreciation

*Geese or  
swans?*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

of swans. The chief difference between them is that the swan has a neck like the serpent which beguiled Mother Eve, while the neck of the goose is hardly long enough to tie into bow-knots. But what have necks to do with the matter ! Geese are really much wiser and nobler creatures. There is a nice picture in our museum of a burial tablet of some ancient Greek maiden whereon she is depicted sitting with her pet goose at her side. On my burial tablet, there will need to be but one figure, and that will not be of the maiden.

NOVEMBER 26TH :—Did Your-Swan-ship ever  
*A nice kind of* know any geese in Japan ? I have been  
*goose* haunted by visions of a whole flock of one particular goose all day. It has been a day full of places where I was needed and I think I filled the needs. Perhaps, after all, the real meaning of being a goose is the consciousness of having under one's quills sufficient down to pillow a whole world of unrest, or mayhap, only enough to pillow one dear, tired head.

Father needed help to-day, as his instructor was sick. So I averaged examination

## SECOND MARRIAGES. HILDA

papers and wrote reports, and to-night he is placidly smoking his pipe and reading *The Nation*. Ma Belle had a sick headache; I found her struggling to get up and go to a charity committee meeting, and she looked all she felt. I know of no ailment that competes with a sick-headache in the power to disenchant its victim with life, the world, and the eternal verities. So I coaxed Ma Belle to lie still and promised to do her vicarious honor in the honorable committee; with a groan of relief she sank back to her pillow and her misery. I do not much enjoy committee work; I am by nature an unorganized being, and like to carry on my activities in my own way. But I stood up in that meeting most vigorously, and rushed business through, right over the prostrate forms of caprices, prejudices and qualms. So efficient was I that a lady came to me afterwards and said she hoped I would be made chairman at the next meeting, and I stood aghast before this misguided success I had achieved. Success is like lightning, one can never guess where it is going to strike.

*One sure  
source of dis-  
enchantment*

*Perturbing  
success*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

Tom was here this evening ; he was manifestly blue and it pleased him to allow me to minister unto him, probably because Ma Belle was ill. I made him "comfy" on the library sofa, and read to him cheerful stories from the last magazines. He was so grateful and dear that I was inspired to go skipping around on all sorts of emotional pinnacles, forgetting all about the years I have spent wandering bruised and battered in malarial valleys.

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **A THANKSGIVING DINNER AND CONVERSATIONAL DESSERT**

**T**HANKSGIVING NIGHT:—Do you have a day set apart in Japan for being thankful whether you have anything to be thankful for or not ? I was the one this year to give the thanksgiving dinner for our small family. Of course Ma Belle was here and to my dismay Joe insisted on inviting his beloved Theodore ; it is my private opinion that this artful gentleman has subsidized Joe. However, I warned Joe saying : “ Please make him understand he is your guest.”

“ All right, Marnie, I will soak up all the credit for the dinner,” he answered cheerfully.

The dinner was good, but I was a most stupid hostess, I suffered a conversational

*Thanksgiving Day*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

numbness which rendered me helpless. I felt as if my social paws were covered with dough so that I could not really take hold of any handle which the talk chanced to offer.

Ma Belle was at her best and scintillated in a way to distract attention from my own unlighted wick. His Lordship was so evidently fascinated by her that I begin to see relief ahead ; he will transfer his age-ignoring affections to Ma Belle, who is not half so old as I any day, and is twice as interesting as I am at my best. We were discussing a certain novel of purpose that people are reading and arguing about, and Ma Belle said :

*Be bad and you will be made into a book*

" There was something tonic in the strong, stern creed of our Puritan ancestors which said plainly : If you do wrong you will go to hell. But the warning signal shining in lurid letters now is, if you do wrong you will be made into the chapters of a book ; and it is enough to glue us fast to the page of virtue. Such a puerile nemesis as this makes one sick of the flowery paths of indulgence." Then up spoke the young man :

" When I write a book, Madam Lee, you

## A THANKSGIVING DINNER

will certainly be in it, but it shall be a novel of delight and not of purpose." He received an interesting flash from mamma's black eyes for this and Joe said :

" No use, Theo., you could never put Tante Belle in a book. You would have to tell untrue things all the time to convey a true idea of her. Tante Belle cannot be reduced to the English language."

"Belle, you have attained!" exclaimed father, "here are two youths making you the most beautiful compliments and I am longing to do the same but find that with age, what is in the heart is not so easily vocalized. Tell me how you manage it?"

"My decrepit head is dizzy with so many compliments. I will confide to you my secret, Robert—it is that of the gambler who believes so enthusiastically in his own little pair of deuces that his opponents are led to believe he holds a royal flush. On my tombstone, Robert, I am going to have this inscription : 'Here lies a woman who bluffed so unflinchingly that her contemporaries were constrained to admit that she had lived!'" and

*An  
interesting  
epitaph*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

she gave father a look which I did not understand ; but I think he did for he flushed.

In the drawing room Mr. Dresden China drew his chair rather closer to mine than was necessary. After a time Joe was called away, and father and Ma Belle became absorbed in discussing the question as to whether Indian Yogis are Christian Scientists, and my companion said in a low tone :

*Doubtful  
reasons for  
being thankful*

“This is the thankfulest thanksgiving that I have ever had ; but next year I shall be still more thankful.”

“How about the next one ?” I asked perversely.

“The next year I shall be so happy that all the days which follow will be thanksgiving days,” he answered with perfect assurance. I had a mind to ask him what he thought was going to happen ; but I was afraid that, if I did, he would tell me, so I said :

“This morning I was trying to ‘think up’ my mercies in order to bring myself into a thanksgiving mood ; but aside from health, strength and happiness and a few other incidentals, I found my inventory a short one.”

## A THANKSGIVING DINNER

"Do you know that when you wear a blue dress your eyes are blue, and when you wear *Chameleon* a gray dress your eyes are gray?" he asked, *eyes* looking at me speculatively.

"And when I wear a red dress my eyes are red!"

"Your eyes are never read, by me at least," he retorted without a smile.

"It is pusillanimous to retreat behind a pun," I objected. He answered with meaning:

"My lady, when you fight with shafts of ridicule, you must expect to witness ridiculous retreats. However, please remember that I live to fight another day when victory shall be mine."

"Will you wear laurel wreaths upon your brow, or carry laurel branches in your hands?" I asked derisively.

"I shall carry them in my heart where they belong, and where you can guard them," he answered. Then we looked at each other a moment; I was curious to discover if his face said anything. In a way, it did; there were certain lines about his mouth which showed *A safe place for keeping laurels*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

determination and his eyes were steady and consequently soon put me on the defensive. I was glad that Joe returned just then and relieved the tension.

*The missing  
link in mascu-  
line character*

Why are n't men straightforward and logical? Why does n't the next thing naturally follow the preceding one with them? And this man is the most disconcerting of them all; there is a link lost in the logic of his actions; the result is a breathless uncertainty as to what he will say and do next. I almost wish you were a man instead of an image, for then you possibly might explain to me these mysterious masculine vagaries.

This evening Tom came, and he with Ma Belle shared our somewhat desultory thanksgiving supper. Tom was in good spirits and said he had been having a fine holiday with his "things in law." Father and Tom smoked and we sat about the library fire and talked of many things; among them, the question as to whether a holiday was a joy or a bore and an interference with work.

"Is n't it fine that man is so adaptable that he has turned the primal curse into a final

## A THANKSGIVING DINNER

blessing! Almost all that the race asks now  
is to be allowed to work continuously," mused  
father. Ma Belle continued his thought : *The primal  
curse, a final  
blessing*

"Yes, and the best thing about work is that  
it is no moralist. It accepts skill as graciously  
from the hands of the prisoner in stripes as  
from the hands of the priest in robe and stole."

"It seems to be the fate of man to want one  
thing and get another; he longs for comfort *Mankind's  
poor bargains*  
and ease and he gets discomfort and hard  
work; and then he is obliged to humiliate  
himself by confessing that what he gets is  
better for him than what he wanted," com-  
mented Tom.

"It is a great step forward to be content  
with the result. Perhaps true wisdom lies in  
learning to exchange the something we desire  
for the something we get and not feel  
cheated," returned father.

"Yes," replied Tom "our truest success evi-  
dently consists in winning the game by carom-  
ing against the immutable and being content *Caroming  
against the  
immutable*  
with skilful zig-zags instead of direct lines of  
victory." Then Joe remarked feelingly :

"Gee! After we have changed our point of

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

view so that our idea of paradise is hard labor, I hope there will be another Eve and another serpent, and that the resulting curse will be 'Go forth and take a rest.' "

"It is not hard work nor overwork that is *We should be well-balanced* the trouble," said Ma Belle, "it is the lack of balance which worries, and wears us out. I have seen a certain toy sold upon the streets so weighted, that, however it tumbles, it always comes to rest head up and smiling. If we could only arrange our burdens likewise ; if they could be so balanced and adjusted that instead of oppressing us they would help us—"

"To bob up serenely ; that is a bully idea," interpolated Joe. She continued :

"Ballast is not only good but necessary, *The place for ballast* only the place for it is in the hold, evenly distributed ; it should not be festooned around the masts."

Later, Joe went home with Ma Belle ; father fell asleep and snored, and I ignored with all my might, saying to Tom :

"I am glad that you are so much happier to-day."

## A THANKSGIVING DINNER

"It is bravado," he answered gloomily, "the gods have been having some fun with me of late—fun for them, I mean."

"I wish you would tell me about it," I said wistfully.

"Oh ! there is nothing to tell, except it is such a deuce of a job to keep the fiddler *Paying the fiddler* paid."

"Heaven forbid that we cease dancing on that account," I murmured ; "after all, strength of character does not lie so much in not dancing, as it does in having the courage to grin when paying the fiddler."

"Great Scott ! One would not kick so much if one simply danced ; but when one is obliged to don the cap and shake the bells to the time of the music, one has a right to feel injured."

"Oh ! I don't know," I went on musingly, "the tyranny of the bells and bauble is most alluring. We try to remember to be wise, but the wide grin paralyzes thought ; and the silvery bells chime in our ears an enchanting music that makes us forget everything, and most of all our own folly."

I arose and went over and shook father into

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

consciousness, and he exclaimed with ready  
*sang froid*: "I awake from dreams of thee, my  
dear ; but need I be awakened with so much ab-  
ruptness!" Soon after, Tom said good-night  
in a most casual manner and left me depressed,  
for some quite inexplicable reason.

Now, you Squat Image, tell me, if you can,  
*Life, a series  
of compro-  
mises*  
how I am to make the grass of this day's ex-  
perience into the hay of wisdom ! At best,  
this world is a place where one may seldom do  
the right thing at the right time ; and at the  
age of forty, one becomes resigned to all sorts  
of compromises, even to calling the same, Life.

## CHAPTER X

### MUSIC LAND, AND A VISIT TO TOM

DECEMBER 2D :—I have been looking at you long this evening, and wondering if it is of any use to talk to you about music. I have heard your Japanese music, and I do not believe you could make me understand what it might mean to your soul, except that I could surely feel the minor wail in it. However, considering that you are a god, and a wooden one too, you can probably comprehend many things which I may not.

I long to tell you about music, if there be any words in our language fit therefor. Music, dear Idol, is another world—a world that has place out in space ; and only one narrow bridge of sense connects that world with ours. Over this bridge we pass to and from that wonderful world, in which there is naught but

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*That other world of music*

motion. There the soul is swayed and lifted to mysterious heights and then plunged into more mysterious depths ; and again it is lifted and gently cradled in the sustaining arms of sound. And when we pass over into that world we forget all that is or has been, and become unconscious of all else besides this realm of exquisite emotion. And because of this forgetting, the places where the spirit is chafed and worn are healed and made whole. Therefore is it that we of this restless western world have deep need and great love for music. You, perhaps, do not need it so much ; for your every-day world is steeped in calm, and for another world you have hasheesh.

*Brutal conversation*

All of this is apropos of a concert which I attended this evening. Joe invited me to go, and I sat in the midst of his "fraternity outfit" as he elegantly (?) describes his fellows. Strictly speaking, Mr. Morris sat constantly at my left, while Joe managed a succession of young men at my right. Some of these felt it incumbent upon them to entertain me lest I should be too much bored by the music ; and if I could have slain them—cut their

## MUSIC LAND, AND A VISIT TO TOM

heads off then and there without making too much litter, I should cheerfully and unhesitatingly have done so. There is nothing so exasperating, when one is intent upon crossing the narrow bridge into that far-away world as to be haled back by brutal conversation.

These kindly but misguided youths found one number of the program quite admirable. *Piano prostration* It was when Professor Von Something or Other made an unprecedented attack upon the piano, and kept at it until the wires seemed quite unstrung ; finally when he retreated the poor instrument was obviously in a fit of nervous prostration.

The wonderful thing about this concert was that the man at my left spoke only when it was right to speak, and several times he came to my aid in warding off my conversational boys, deftly reducing them to dumbness. He gave me the feeling of support by his sympathy ; evidently his bridge is close to mine. I spoke to him but a conventional word about the concert, and yet when he wrapped my cloak around me he said :

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Sympathy quite unexpected* “I never realized before that you cared so much for music. I shall come sometime and play for you.” I made no answer; so long as he declared he was coming, there seemed little left for me to say. But on the way home I probed Joe, saying:

“I did not know that Mr. Morris was a musician; does he play the banjo?”

“Banjo! Gee, would n’t he like that! He plays a violin made by some old Italian duffer. He thinks we fellows are n’t good enough to listen to his music except on grand occasions. Usually he and Phil Schlegel go off together and play for hours with the door locked. Theo loves Phil’s accompaniments and neither likes to have any one around listening; but some of the fellows go and listen at the key-hole and they say that their playing is out of sight.”

*Too many accomplishments* “Naturally!” I ejaculated crossly. I somehow did not like the idea of his loving music or being a musician; he ought to be contented with being a porcelain box without being an autoharp also.

## MUSIC LAND, AND A VISIT TO TOM

DECEMBER 4th :—I think I shall erect an altar to your Pagan Divinity, and burn things on it after the fashion of altars; the first thing I shall burn is a letter I received to-day which says :

PHI DELTA ALPHA LODGE, December 4th, 1904.  
My Ladye:

I have been holding my pen over the paper for a long moment, while thinking how to fitly address you. "Dear" yea, verily, so deeply dear that the word quite fails to express it. I shall have to find some new word to express you as I know you. Any word would fit you so long as it were not used twice; dear, good, bad, cynic, optimist, adorable, and a whole dictionary full of others.

*A most  
amazing  
letter*

That is why I find it so difficult to find one word that will fit the composite picture of you which is mine. Did you ever notice how much more beautiful is the composite photograph than any of those from which it is made? It is because I comprehend your many-sidedness that *my you* is better and lovelier than any single phase of you could possibly be. I see the harder lines of your strength softened by your womanliness and tenderness; while your womanly qualities are more perfectly rounded because of the child that is still in you.

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

But I could write a volume without exhausting all I know of this interesting subject, and the object of this note is, after all, to tell you that I am called out of town for three days, and I would not have you forget me in that eon of absence. Do not forget me, my ladye, for it will not be of the slightest advantage to you if you do.

Yours faithfully,

THEODORE MORRIS.

Forget him, indeed ! Little god, have n't  
*Athirst for* you a phial of Lethe water in your pocket so  
*the waters of*  
*Lethe* that you can give me a dose and thus afford  
me the comfort of forgetting this same Theodore Morris for three days ! But meanwhile, please do not let me forget that too often what is meet for love is likely later to turn out meat for repentance.

DECEMBER 5TH :—I had another letter today from another man. Yea, from quite a different man, and therefore quite a different letter. I will read it to you, and I shall be greatly obliged if you will tell me what you really think about it.

THE CLINTON, December 9th, 1904.

Oh ! Madam Marian, knowest thou that I have

## MUSIC LAND, AND A VISIT TO TOM

sprained my ankle and lost my case ( a jury being just twelve times as idiotic as it would be if composed of one individual.)

I am laid up and obliged to spend my time in meditation. I am biffed by misfortune on both cheeks, and in my meditations I have been trying to gather figs from thistles.

It is a great advantage to have all of one's miseries coincident and contemporaneous, so I plan to stop smoking—unless you and your Ma Belle come to see me and cheer me sufficiently so that I shall be courageous enough to retain one pleasure in life.

Yours,

Tom.

P. S. My philosophy seems quite inadequate to-night for the demands upon it; it has spells of this sort; 'tis a slumpy philosophy.

T. C.

Of course we went. Tom has some attractive bachelor apartments with some beautiful rugs on the floors and some delightful pictures on the walls. He was lying on the sofa attired in a most becoming brown velvet smoking jacket. It is such a pity men cannot wear the smoking jacket at social functions instead of the foolish garment customary.

*Quite another kind of a letter*

*An interesting visit*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

Ma Belle sat by his side and patted his hand in an entrancing manner; and he was miserable enough to be a small boy and be glad. Ma Belle is not wasteful of her caresses and they have all the value of conserved boons.

"What have you been thinking about now that you have had nothing to do but think?" she asked.

"Wondering where the hole in the center *Profitless speculations* of the maelstrom leads to," he answered whimsically.

"I think the rim would be a more interesting subject for speculation," suggested I. "Anyway, I think you might put your leisure to better use by just loafing and inviting your soul."

"It has been so long since I sent such an *A mislaid address* invitation that I fear I have lost the address," he returned.

"Tom, where is a certain document that you were to let me have this week? If it is at hand I might as well take it now and save you further trouble," asked Ma Belle.

"It is in the library desk," he answered.

## MUSIC LAND, AND A VISIT TO TOM

“Marian, will you be so kind as to step into the other room and bring me a paper tied with red tape that is in the middle pigeon-hole of the lower row in the desk by the window ?”

I entered the library with a conscious pleasure in the richness of color which pervaded the place. There was a harmony between hangings, rugs and furniture that permitted no one thing to be prominent in claiming the attention of the observer—a harmony which mellowed and enhanced the attractiveness of the room. The desk was of handsomely carved mahogany—one that Tom had found in Florence years before ; the number of crowns wrought into the carving showed that it had once been used by royalty. As I reached for the paper the lace in my sleeve caught the top of the ornate silver inkstand ; I made a spasmodic but successful effort to avert the threatened calamity, and I must have accidentally touched a hidden spring ; a part of the beautifully patterned front below the pigeonholes fell back on its hinges revealing an inner compartment.

*The room  
harmonious*

*A desk with a  
secret  
compartment*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

What I saw there I could not help seeing : a  
*Lilies-of-the-  
Valley* bunch of sere and yellowed lilies-of-the-valley tied with a faded purple ribbon. I hastily lifted the door to its place and came back to the other room with a queer, guilty feeling which I cannot describe, nor quite account for.

Tom was manifestly cheered by our visit ; but that was mostly due to Ma Belle's efforts. I could say but little, for I was deeply annoyed at my awkward intrusion into Tom's private affairs. I should have felt more honest to confess the blunder at once, but that would have been absolutely impossible. But ever since, I have been in a daze wondering, and wondering, —

## CHAPTER XI

### HILDA PLAYS AN ACCOMPANIMENT

DECEMBER 8TH :—Smile, smile, please smile. For if gods smile not at the ways of men and women, pray, who may? This morning I had a telephone message from Mr. Morris telling me of his return and asking if he and Mr. Schlegel might come this evening and play for me; of course I said I should be most happy, though as a matter of fact I was quite the reverse. Hilda was to spend the afternoon and evening with me for our first long visit since her return.

Moreover, I would not for worlds have Hilda guess the infatuation of that most embarrassing youth. She would either make sarcastic remarks, or think them, which is really worse. The cruellest thing in the world is the unspoken criticism of a devoted and loyal friend, when intimacy lays bare the vulnerable spot.

*The most  
cruel of all  
criticism*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

It sometimes comes to me like the vision  
*Reasons of a nightmare* that I shall finally probably  
*inexplicable* yield and marry Theodore Morris. And then  
the thought occurs to me that if I do, Hilda  
and Tom and my other friends will naturally  
have to know about it, and I suddenly realize  
how utterly preposterous such an act would  
be. I think I might marry him if no one ex-  
cept you were ever to know about it, though  
*why I would do it is beyond my fathoming.*

I did not mention to Hilda during the after-  
*Brown eyes noon* that I expected any callers in the evening,  
*and blue* though I thought of it several times. Mr. Mor-  
ris arrived rather early and alone except for  
his violin, which is evidently a creature of  
much personality to its owner. I introduced  
him to Hilda, and his inscrutable brown eyes  
looked into her quite inscrutable blue ones ;  
but what the owner of either pair of eyes  
thought I had no way of discovering.

He was more taciturn than usual and was  
*A social evidently annoyed* that I was not alone, and  
*aerobat* that his accompanist did not come. Hilda was  
not interested and stupidly said nothing to re-  
lieve the situation. Therefore I felt it incum-

## HILDA PLAYS AN ACCOMPANIMENT

bent upon me to break the tension by various socially acrobatic feats, which Mr. Morris regarded in sphinx-like silence, and Hilda with speculative amusement. Their combined attitudes led me on to higher leaps and to a final trapeze performance, during which I swung giddily from the new Dante collection in the University library to the antics of the last minstrel show. At length I gave up from sheer exhaustion, when I was suddenly inspired to suggest that Hilda play the accompaniment and that we have music immediately. Mr. Morris looked supercilious and doubtful and Hilda was unfeignedly wrathful. Then I grew serene and insistent and felt revenged for having been obliged to exhibit myself in the ring of their mutual silence. Hilda went grudgingly to the piano, saying :

“I hope you will understand, Mr. Morris, that I am your involuntary accomplice.” He said not a word but I noticed with a chuckle that he looked his music over and selected the most difficult piece in his roll. If it had been something simple and easy, it is possible that Hilda would have at the last moment refused

*Reluctant  
musicians*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

to play at all. But when she saw those pages of notes that looked as if they had hysteria, she sat down on the piano stool with decision, and her pretty lips took on an expression of stern determination which meant accomplishment.

Hilda is what I could never be—an ideal *accompanist*; she subordinates herself not alone to the music, but also to the mood of her companion. Their first page together was executed almost as perfectly as if they had been in the habit of playing with each other for weeks. This success had its influence upon them and I felt the barriers between them melting away in harmony.

*Music demands but one sense* They both played superbly, and I, unnoticed, threw myself upon the sofa and covered my eyes with my hands while I listened. I am a truly primitive being and I cannot listen to music and see anything whatever coincidentally. I am either seeing all things and hearing nothing or hearing all things and seeing nothing. Therefore, I like best to close my eyes, and then cross the bridge to music land without faltering or wavering. They

## HILDA PLAYS AN ACCOMPANIMENT

played on and on, and finally concluded with Handel's sonata in A major. So moved had I been with their music that I felt I must be careful or I should say something sentimental; so I made my thanks quite commonplace, and the conversation, much limbered by the music, became fairly interesting.

Since Hilda had been so recently in Germany, we naturally questioned her about the music she had heard while there; she was most enthusiastic over the *Probe* concerts and the opera. She turned to me and said :

"I thought of you, Marian, when I heard your favorite *Trompeter von Saeckingen*, and experienced several thrills for you; although when they sung, '*Es ist im Leben doch so hässlich eingerichtet*,' I did not wipe my eyes nor blow my nose as did the sentimental damsel next to me. By the way, that night we sat up in the fourth gallery and our seats cost eighty pfennige each; we nibbled lemon drops and looked down at the *Parterre-Fremden-Loge* and the *Balkon erster Rang*, where you and I in our opulent youth were wont to disport ourselves. Theater prices have gone

*Varioius  
thrills*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

up since those happy days, so we clomb to the tip-top for fun and experiment. The air was not so bad considering that it was German, but the bench was too narrow for anything save penance."

"What is the matter with the German atmosphere, is it thick with anything besides harmony ?" asked Mr. Morris.

"It seems to me," answered Hilda thought-

*The elements in Deutschland* fully, "that the Germans are peculiar in their relations to the elements. They seem to be able to do without air, fire or water in their habitations and daily lives, and make up for it by their love for the dear earth."

"How cruel of you," I exclaimed, "when you know that the German attitude toward music is ideal !"

"I was speaking of their relation to the elements and not to the Muses," corrected Hilda.

It was rather late when Mr. Morris went away. I was for some mysterious reason impelled to follow him to the door and say : "Thank you, it was heavenly!"

"It was heaven to play when you were

## HILDA PLAYS AN ACCOMPANIMENT

listening," he answered in a tone as low as my own, and then I wished I had had sense enough to have kept still. I do not understand in the least why I followed him to the door and made that insane remark : it is another instance of my infinite capacity for fatuity.

When I came back to the parlor I experienced a sense of uneasiness and guilt ; but as usual, I covered my perturbation with cheerful volubility. I asked with a candid glibness which surprised even my accustomed self :

" Hilda, what do you think of that youth ? "

" He plays extremely well," was her non-committal reply. I went on :

" I am glad Phil Schlegel did not come, for I never heard you play better."

" Thanks, where did you find His Lordship ? "

" He is one of Joe's friends," I answered mechanically, and the conversation drifted to other channels. But I had an inner conviction that we were both consciously avoiding any

*A fatuous performance*

*An unsatisfactory conversation*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Auricular expansion* discussion of Theodore Morris. Now please tell me why she did not wish to talk with me about him ? Does she suspect anything ? I do not believe it. What is there to suspect ! Nothing at all ! I will tell you a secret which I discovered some time since : Some of the heart's experiences are auricular and some ventricular ; but it is only once in a lifetime that the whole heart is concerned. And I have a foreboding that this affair of mine with Theodore Morris is a case of auricular expansion, and that it will surely result in the development of some baleful *itis* which cannot be either cured or endured.

DECEMBER 9TH :—I am glad you receive my confidences so understandingly ; it encourages me to give you details.

At breakfast this morning, Joe asked Hilda what she thought of his friend whom she met last evening.

“Perfeckly booful,” she replied promptly. Joe did not like to hear baby-talk applied to his hero ; so he asked diplomatically :

“Is n’t he a fine violinist ?”

## HILDA PLAYS AN ACCOMPANIMENT

"Yes," said Hilda, with a reticence of some unguessable portent.

The whole day has seemed unreal, especially since Hilda went home this morning. Many times I have found myself dreaming of the music of last evening—dreaming with my eyes open. That is what I am doing with this man all the time—dreaming with my eyes open.

*Dreaming  
with eyes  
open*

The best I can say of such a day as this, is, that though it shortens my life by twenty-four hours, I am glad it is over. Not that it was an especially hard day but it was bewildering and listless ; and now I listen while the tatters of this battered caravanserai flap dubiously with every wind that blows.

## CHAPTER XII

### A COMEDY, A TRAGEDY, AND THE WAY OF THE FOOL

DECEMBER 10TH :—I do not suppose you ever went to a play! Or was, perchance, the procession of humanity before your shrine as good as a play to you? To-night Joe, Mr. Morris, Hilda and myself went to hear *Nance Oldfield* which was wholly delightful, and *Madelaine*, which was wholly depressing. Between the acts Mr. Morris was thoughtfully looking at the audience through the reversed opera glasses; I asked the reason for this original performance, and he murmured :

“I am trying to put all those people so far away that I can believe you and I are alone.” He then turned directly to Hilda, with whom he had been carrying on a spirited conversation, and asked, platitudinously :

## THE WAY OF THE FOOL

"I suppose you speak German fluently?"

"Too fluently, alas!" sighed Hilda. "I had no end of trials because of this ease."

"For instance?"

"Well, one day I had ordered some beautiful roses to deck the table of my *salon* for expected guests, but the roses came not; I waxed nervous and was on the point of starting for the flower shop when I met a servant in the hall bearing two packages of flowers and who seemed to be looking for some one to rid her of her burden. With a cry of joy, I seized one parcel and beat a triumphant retreat. The roses were not the kind I had ordered, but I thought they had been sent as substitutes. A little later the roses I had ordered came, and the messenger knew nothing of those I already had. All the afternoon I wondered whose roses I had rifled from the helpless Dienstmädchen and pictured him or her foaming at the mouth with vexation. That evening our bell rang, and a tall and inoffensive young fellow asked in German if a few roses he had ordered might perchance have—here I cut in with artless glee, and tried to

*Hilda and the  
German  
tongue*

*Misapplied  
roses*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

express in hasty but well-chosen terms my distress at having abducted his roses. I hastened to bring him the flowers and to explain the situation in language that would have brought tears to the eyes of a Goethe or a Schiller, and was winding up with a fervid peroration imploring his pardon, and assuring him of my undiminished esteem for his nation and himself, when he suddenly stemmed the tide of my eloquence by remarking in the most English of English :

“ ‘ It does not matter ; I thank you very *A safe though frail foundation* much. Good evening.’ I longed then for the dear dead past when my vocabulary was limited to *guten Morgen* and *danke schön*, for even I could not have conversed indefinitely on that frail foundation.”

We all laughed, and even while we were laughing Mr. Morris turned toward me and said in his peculiar *sotto voce*, a way he has of saying things to me without moving his lips and with perfectly expressionless face, so that any one sitting near and looking directly at him would not know that he was speaking :

“ How superb you are to-night ! You

## THE WAY OF THE FOOL

should always wear that exquisite shade of *Conversation* gray; it just matches your eyes and hair as *for two* your pink roses match your cheeks. I am sure I shall write a poem myself on 'My Lady Gray-gown.'

And while I was listening to this absurd talk, I felt myself blush and I felt as fluttery as if I had been sixteen. Meanwhile I appreciated fully just the kind of idiot I was. Oh, dear! I sometimes feel as if I had enough of Life's irony on hand to create a trust!

Between the plays, Tom, who had escorted Ma Belle, came over to visit us and sat for a moment on the railing of our loge in my immediate vicinity.

"Do you know that you are sitting on the brink?" I asked with severity. "If you fall *Several kinds of brinks* over, you will be drowned in that sea of humanity."

"Don't trouble yourself, I can swim in that sea all right. My real danger lies in carefully sitting on the brink, a far more dangerous pastime than falling over."

"Why do you talk enigmas to me who never guessed one in my life?" I asked obtusely.

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"Ah, Marian, are n't you ashamed to wrest compliments from me by unfairly pushing me when you see me sitting on the brink? To be explicit, you are looking so particularly radiant to-night, that——"

"That will do," I interrupted, "I shall ponder the matter and perhaps I may be able to guess the reason for such unprecedented remarks."

"No, you will never guess; for, Madam *Very, very stupid* Marian, you are very, very stupid." And then I wondered what he did mean.

The last play of the evening was Madelaine, a strong presentation of the old, old story—she loving so much that she must weep and upbraid, and he be bored thereby; a story that has been played over and over since the creation of the first man and woman. For do you know it, little god, man loves to fight and do strong, physically aggressive things for a woman, but he does not want her *When she loves too much* "wopsis" around him, tangling his feet, and hindering his arms meanwhile. And yet, a true woman was never yet born who did not have it in her to passionately desire to

## THE WAY OF THE FOOL

tangle and hinder the man she loves. Why is this so? You nor all your fellow gods could not tell. And it is a wise woman who guards carefully that tendency in herself without asking counsel of either gods or men.

No one can be powerful and masterful when really in love; it somehow sweeps out the foundations from under one's feet, leaving nothing to stand on. I wonder how it would seem to be married to a man and not love him so much but that I could make life interesting every day; to be able to give him the constant impression that however much he already had of me, it was but a small part of what there remained to attain, and in all ways give over my energies to beguiling him. Fascinating vista, that! I am almost afraid that I shall try it. I wish you would give me a little advice for the strengthening of my vertebral column; it is so limp that it manifestly needs starch. What a delightful idea! A backbone freshly laundered!

After the play we all felt downcast, and Mr. Morris proposed that we "get the taste out of our mouths" by a supper at Trascati's;

*A dangerous speculation*

*The  
restaurant  
waiter's hero*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

and at our urgent invitation Ma Belle and Tom joined us. We found a screened alcove in the gay little restaurant which gave us a happy sense of privacy. It was a pleasure to me to witness the skill with which Mr. Morris ordered the supper—skill that obviously made a mighty impression upon the waiter. Probably it is more difficult to be a hero to a restaurant waiter these days, than to one's own valet.

I thought I had never seen both Ma Belle and Hilda so beautiful. Ma Belle wore a bodice of wine-colored velvet and some handsome old lace ; her dark, expressive eyes were full of scintillations and so was her wit. Hilda's gown was of pale-blue, fluffy material which made her head look like that of a rosy cherub over a blue cloud. The expression of her big blue eyes was more than usually innocent and guileless and I predicted trouble ahead. Ma Belle was indignant at having had her feelings lacerated by the play, and said :

“I detest these social plays. If we must have tragedy let us have the real thing, like

## THE WAY OF THE FOOL

Julius Cæsar, where we would feel hurt if the play did not end with the stage heaped high with the murdered and the dead. The only legitimate fool on the stage is a Touchstone or a Costard. I object to all others, and I especially object to this Madelaine because she was so drearily real."

*The only  
legitimate  
tragedy*

"Let's have a round-table on the interesting subject of fools," suggested Joe, "we can drown the pangs of hunger by telling about all the kinds of fools there are. Gee, I wish my rhetoric Prof. could hear that sentence, drown the pangs ! Tante Belle you begin and tell us what constitutes a fool."

*A round-table  
on "Fools"*

"A fool," answered Ma Belle, "is a person who takes infinite pains to do something which neither he nor anybody else wishes to have done. A fool builds his mills on the theory that water runs up hill instead of down."

"It seems to me, the difference between a wise person and a foolish one is that when the former meets with the inevitable, he turns his back upon it and looks in the opposite direction ; while the latter always

*Two ways of  
meeting the  
inevitable*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

kicks it hard and then says ‘damn’ because it hurt his foot,” said Tom. Mr. Morris toyed thoughtfully with his fork and then said smoothly :

*Unexpected anatomical knowledge* “A fool is constantly aware of the pain in his own heart ; the wise feel only the pain in the hearts of others. That is, a fool may help others, but cannot help himself.” We were all silent for a moment ; we were rather stunned, I suspect, to discover that this man knew anything about hearts and their troubles. Hilda relieved the situation by declaring impressively :

*The step that is n't there* “A fool does not count his steps as he ascends life’s dark stairway, and he only knows when he reaches the top, by the jar that comes from trying to ascend a step which is n’t there.”

“That is a description of an optimist,” I objected.

“ You tell us what an optimist is, Madam Lee,” said Mr. Morris.

*A successful optimist* “Oh, an optimist is one who is always trying to make apple-sauce out of the apples of

## THE WAY OF THE FOOL

Sodom," answered Ma Belle with a smile.  
"Marian is a good example."

"Joe, you have not yet defined a fool," said I, trying to distract the attention from my optimism.

"A fool spends so much time making his living that he has no time to live." Joe's air of superiority as he delivered this made us all laugh. Then Mr. Morris turned to me,

"Mrs. Lee, I am curious to know what your definition is of this most interesting species which we are discussing." I looked him straight in the eyes as I said :

"I agree with Ma Belle, a fool does things she does not wish to do, just because she is a *Food for reflection* fool," and I thought if he understood me as well as he pretended to he might find food for reflection in my remark.

"After all these definitions, almost am I persuaded to be a fool," he answered gaily. Ma Belle laughed and said :

"I hold that one owes it to one's self to be a *The debt to self and to society* fool now and then, but one surely owes it to society not to act like one."

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"It is the wise who are glad when the oysters are served," said Tom, dryly, as the waiter appeared. While we were still at table, the clock struck for midnight, and Tom asked thoughtfully,

"Will some one please tell me whether midnight belongs to the day before or the day after?"

"It is the time divide," said Hilda, "on one *Midnight the side of it flows the stream of yesterday, on time divide* the other the brook of to-morrow."

"Not always," ventured I, "for sometimes it brings reminiscences and philosophizing over the day passed, and then it is a part of yesterday; and sometimes it brings vows for future improvement, which annexes it to the morrow."

"Yes," agreed Tom, "it depends upon the notch of the clock where we begin to tear the days apart."

"It is not the clock but sleep that separates our days," said Mr. Morris.

"Then insomnia would make life one long *Hilda's day,*" pertly remarked Hilda. He answered *insomnia* with positiveness :

## THE WAY OF THE FOOL

"You never had insomnia, Miss Vincent, how do you know?" Hilda opened her innocent eyes at their widest and said :

"How little you understand me, Mr. Morris, I never by any chance sleep; I lie awake every night meditating on how farther to pursue the primrose path of joy."

"Then it is not your sins which keep you awake?" he asked lamely.

"Not the sins I have committed, but those I hope to commit," murmured Hilda sweetly; he looked at her keenly, and I wondered what he would do if she should really unsheathe her claws for his edification. Tom said smilingly :

"An interesting vista, that; won't you please tell us the very worst sin you ever were guilty of?"

"Murdered little children for the corals on their necks," promptly responded Hilda.

"The very first time that I ever saw you I recognized you as Gentle Alice Brown," declared Mr. Morris, impressively. Ma Belle and I exchanged glances; the porcelain box evidently contained the Bab Ballads among other surprising things.

*The Bab  
Ballads in the  
porcelain box*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

As the four of us drove home we let Hilda out first. While we waited for Joe to return from escorting her to the door, Mr. Morris took the seat that she had vacated at my side, and said, with quite appalling tenderness :

“ My lady, you have made me very happy to-night.”

“ You have great powers for concealing *A deceptive* your feelings. I should never have suspected *calm* that you were animated by anything save your natural calm,” was my supercilious reply.

“ What would you have me do, pipe on a *An obvious* reed and dance like a faun when I am happy? *indiscretion* Natural calm! Natural and perpetual turmoil rather! I fear my lady has made little progress in understanding me. I have never experienced a day of calm since I was born that I can remember.” There was a note of despondency in his voice as he said this which touched me, and as we heard Joe’s approaching footsteps I did a perfectly insane thing—I for one brief second let my hand rest upon his; and I believe that

## THE WAY OF THE FOOL

he understood that it was an act of contrition.  
I am perfectly well aware that my attitude  
toward him is perverse and often unjust, but  
how can I help it !

When we arrived at our gate, Joe stopped  
to pay the cabman, and Mr. Morris went  
with me to the door, helping me skilfully  
up the steps by holding my arm, although I  
was wrapped in a swathing cocoon of opera  
cloak. How is it that some men know how  
to do all those things which add to a woman's  
comfort, and some others just as good and  
just as tender are so helpless and awkward ?  
Perhaps the skill comes from much practice ?  
Perish the thought ! In that case a woman  
might prefer the unskilful. " 'T is a poor  
thing, but mine own," is the creed feminine.  
However, I am not feminine in this respect ;  
I like the man who knows. If he has spent  
his life in the practice which makes perfect,  
then will I gladly avail myself of the fruits  
thereof, nor spend my energies speculating  
on how many teachers he may have had.  
When my Sir Gallant bade me good night, he

*The man who  
knows*

## CONFESSEONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

kissed my hand, though of course I wore a glove. I have just been examining the glove to see if there were holes burned in it.

Come to think of it, you Poor Heathen, you *A kiss explained* do not know what a kiss is! How I am to enlighten your oriental intelligence on this point without kissing you, I fail to see. A kiss is an invention of mortals so that they should never be envious of the gods. It is a compensation for having to live in this "vale of tears." It is the divine seal set upon human lips, and there is no revealing what it covers. It is the focal point of the physical and the spiritual; yet, like all the gifts of mortals it has been dragged into the mire and the commonplace. All mankind's belongings, like water, seem to seek the lowest level, ah me!



"Come to think of it, you Poor Heathen, you do not know what a  
kiss is"



## CHAPTER XIII

### CHRISTMAS, A WALK WITH TOM AND AN ANNUAL SETTLEMENT WITH THE FATES

CHRISTMAS :—I confess that I have retained the attitude of a child about this day ; I look forward to it with breathlessly joyful expectation ; and any Christmas present however worthless intrinsically, or embarrassing in its uselessness is, to me, a source of true delight, and I spend the day in gloating. I enjoy the preceding weeks of making and buying things, as Hilda says, to put people under obligations to me, and make them “go staggering on a whole year under the burden.” Hilda does not take my view of Christmas ; she said yesterday : “ I should like to abolish the whole cycle of presentations ; the only thing I really enjoy about Christmas is getting the letters, which mostly do not come because my friends have been busy making

*Differing  
views of  
Christmas*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

useless and futile presents instead of writing them." I imagine that if the Christmas celebration had been kept spiritual instead of physical in its manifestations, it would have been better for most "grown-ups." And yet Christmas is the only instance in this matter-of-fact land of a child holiday carried over into all ages.

I did have one little mental struggle this year while planning my gifts: I could not make up my mind whether I should send Theodore Morris a present or not. I was certain that he would send me something in a way that I could not refuse without making myself disagreeable, and I have n't moral courage enough to bring myself to be disagreeable, no matter what happens. I solved my problem by sending T. M. a Mosher book. Heaven bless Mr. Mosher for making pretty and unusual books! He has thereby helped me out of many a dilemma. The book I sent was *The Kuzidah*, of Sir Richard Burton, which seemed sufficiently impersonal for the situation. As I feared, a present came from the young man and of course it was very per-

*Courage required to be disagreeable*

## CHRISTMAS

sonal—a gray fan, exquisite enough for a fairy princess; with it came a card bearing the inscription, “A fan for My Lady Gray-gown; may it keep her brow cool and her heart warm for the giver.” I thought as I gazed at the dainty web that what I needed most was sure aid in keeping my head cool in my relations with the giver. This evening I received a special delivery letter from New York, where he has gone for the holidays, and it says :

“ Dear My Lady, thank you for this little volume so beautiful without, and so philosophic within. It came just as I started and has been the companion of my journey.

“I have been so happy all day that I had small need of philosophy, so I have been reveling in the beauty of the verse. I gazed out of the window, and watched the river, turbid but luminous like amber; and the white sycamores along its banks joined hands, and danced for me stately minuets against a moving curtain painted with dull blue hills and sodden skies.

“All day long, whether reading or looking out of the window, I have dreamed of My Lady, and have murmured over and over :

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

‘All other life is living Death,  
A world where none but Phantoms dwell,  
A wind, a sound, a voice, a breath,  
A tinkling of a camel bell.’

Yours  
“T. M.”

Oh, you prescient bit of wood, will you tell  
*“The tinkling of the camel bell”* me whether it is T. M. who is listening to the  
tinkling of the camel bell, or is it I, or mayhap  
both ! After I had read this letter twice, I  
longed for a spot in a desert without a  
caravan, a camel, or even a coyote between  
me and the horizon.

To turn to a more agreeable topic, Tom  
*The giver of “Walden”* sent me a beautifully illustrated edition of  
*Walden*. That was just like Tom ; there is  
nothing hectic or feverish about him or his  
relations to people ; he is devoted to Thoreau,  
the man who said “I could tame a hyena  
more easily than my friend.” Nice Christmas  
day !

DECEMBER 26TH :—It has snowed all day  
great, feathery, lazy flakes, which did not  
seem to care whether they were coming from

## CHRISTMAS

or going to the skies. Hilda spent the morning with me, and it is a great pity that you were unable to hear all that we said. We let the years lapse and were girls together, and nothing in the world below or the heavens above was safe from us, our interests and opinions. Once I said to Hilda tentatively, "What do you think of Mr. Morris ?" "Mr. Morris ? Why, I have n't thought much about him," quoth the provoking Hilda, and the conversation lagged. This reticence on Hilda's part seems to me portentous and makes me uneasy. She may suspect the truth, but I doubt it; she is far more likely to suspect that I am trying to get her interested in him.

This afternoon Tom telephoned me that he was coming at three o'clock to take me for a *A snowy walk* walk. That is just like Tom; no one else would have thought of taking me to walk on such a day. I was ready in short dress and high gaiters when he came, and we walked up the river path through a world carved from crystal. The white hills were crowned and girdled with purple forests, pale purple now

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

behind the bridal veil which obscured them.

*Achieving the  
purples* Strange how every shadow in a snowy landscape is purple! It is a fine thing to be able to see the purple in the shadows, little god; when one has achieved the purples, one is then ready to live.

*The ice-  
bound brook* The weeds by the roadside were so covered that they made strange towers and minarets, as if they were temples from your Orient wrought in alabaster instead of ivory. The wily hemlocks had drooped their arms and let slide the snow burden which the helpless pines still bore in tufts on each individual tassel. As we climbed the hill, we ventured down the soft cushioned bank to the rift made by the brook, and we heard it tinkle contentedly beneath its snow-weighted roof. Did you ever break the ice on a still pool, and see the strange figures that decorate the ceiling of the brook's temple? As a child, I believed that these frescoes were wrought by naiads, but now I know better, and I said as we listened:

"The reason why the brook is so happy is that it sings the song of joyful achievement

## CHRISTMAS

while it works." We noted that a vireo's nest neatly hung in a beech sapling was the base of a column of snow, and Tom said :

"That is a cold burden for a nest once kept *The winter  
nest* warm by a mother's breast."

"It is soft and white and not too heavy; better be that way than to be empty," I answered.

"What do you know about it," he asked rather sternly.

"Nothing, I was only making entertaining conversation."

"Marian Lee, you are sometimes most confoundedly flippant, do you realize it!"

"Let's forget we are grown up, and have fun; let's hold hands and run down hill!" pleaded I.

"Let's," he shouted, and suiting the action to the word, down we came through the soft snow and involuntarily sat in the great drift at the bottom, breathless and laughing. When we came to the main road we brushed each other off so as to look as decorous as possible when we returned. As Tom left me he said with his most winning smile:

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"Nice little girl, will you go sleigh-riding  
*A nice time* with me pretty soon?"

"Nice old boy, I will."

I feel rather hazy about your knowledge of snow; do they have beautiful, cozy snowstorms in Japan? If so, there is no need to tell you that they are the most wonderful things that ever happened.

JANUARY 1ST:—On this day I always square accounts with the Fates, those "subtle girls" as Henley calls them. I wonder which of the three is the most difficult to deal with! I rather like Clotho, with her spinning, even if she does give me a tangled skein; and I have no quarrel with Lachesis, though she is a roué, a gambler and a cheat, tossing loaded dice to cast the lots of men. But Atropos, the Inevitable, is the one against whom I rebel; she is always sitting there with her shears ready to snip the threads just as they become most interesting. The other Fates are the givers of gifts, even though the same be of doubtful value; but dreary old Atropos takes away; she is the end—the blank, dead end of things.

Well, I fear it is a fact that during the past

## CHRISTMAS

twelve months I have learned some brand-new and quite undesirable facts about myself, and if you do not know what they are I shall not tell you. It has always been my faulty way to "make believe" that I am whatever it suits circumstances to make me. The moment that some chance happening gives me the cue, I dash madly on to the stage, and seem to have no choice, but must play the part allotted to me whether it is really mine or not.

*Obliged to  
take the cue*

Too often am I swept on and on without volition, a leaf on the stream of circumstance. But I accept the fact with less regret than formerly. Maybe it is because I have become hardened by witnessing the performance so often; and maybe it is because of an indifference which may be the precursor of reformation. If one looks with apathy upon the result of an action, one may hope to look with apathy upon the reason for the action. Only the most beautiful road tempts the feet to wander into by-ways leading over green meadows and hills. But when in the desert, there is no incentive to go out of the straight and narrow trail.

*The  
safeguard of  
indifference*

## CHAPTER XIV

**MA BELLE, HILDA AND TOM COME TO DINE,  
AND THEODORE MORRIS MAKES A MORNING  
CALL**

*Only the pursuit of happiness guaranteed*

**D**ECEMBER 29TH :—The Mother Beautiful and Tom and Hilda were here to dinner this evening. Ma Belle seems tired ; any shadow on her face troubles me, for I do not know what I should do if I did not have her. She was as delightful as ever in her talk ; when we wished her a happy new year, she said :

“The constitution of the United States does not guarantee us the right of happiness, but the right to the pursuit of happiness instead, and I am still in keen pursuit, thank you.”

“Were Washington and Jefferson then subtle jokers, and did they know that the pursuit is far more interesting than the fulfilment ?” asked father.

“You bet, I am going on the warpath for

## A DINNER PARTY AND A CALLER

it this year and I 'll snatch a whole bunch, see if I don't," declared Joe, in college vernacular.

"Don't aim too high," cautioned Tom.

"Each one starts out believing that he is on his own private trail for happiness, but he belongs to the procession just the same," added father.

*We all belong  
to the  
procession*

"Yes," agreed Ma Belle, "can and must are high fences, and the whole herd is driven between them; if an individual thinks he is an exception and tries to force his way through a broken panel anywhere, he is a pig and delays the progress of the herd and has to amble on eventually, all the more tired because of his break for freedom."

"True," mused father, "the individual seems of little consequence in the great scheme, except perhaps as a cog in the wheel of development; or, to change the metaphor, he may be a bit of fuel thrust into the firebox of the engine of progress."

*Firing the  
engine of  
progress*

"Optimist!" ejaculated Ma Belle, and we all laughed. "Anyway," said father, turning to Joe, "the individual who thinks his happiness

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

is the end and aim of creation is likely to be surprised soon or late."

"I 'm that individual all right, Pater, let the surprise come. Hoop-la!" replied Joe.

"Ma Belle, what makes you look so tired to-night?" I asked solicitously.

"I am tired ; I spent the morning addressing the envelopes for the invitations to my *wheels of social functions* reception. All the time I was doing it I thought, 'such a waste of good, precious stamps' ; for when they who receive these invitations which cost me mental anguish, sticky fingers and four cents each, read them they will say 'Humph!' It is the way of the world social : one half spends its time, strength and money doing things for the other half which make it exclaim 'Humph!' and then the other half feels it necessary to return the complimentary with like results."

"That may be true of other people's receptions, but not of yours, Mrs. Lee," declared Hilda.

"The special use of such functions is a subject for prayerful reflection," rejoined Ma Belle ; "usually, the giving or attending them

## A DINNER PARTY AND A CALLER

results in a tedium that makes us sing *Te Deum* when they are over. I never give a reception without wishing for the power of the lower animals to reproduce lost parts, so that I could divide myself into at least six sections, and let each one develop into a complete individual ; then there might be enough of me to meet the necessities of the occasion."

"There could never be too many of you, Tante Belle," said Joe, who is a devoted knight of Ma Belle's.

"I think I would rather there were only one of you, Madam Lee," avowed Tom with unction, and she flushed a little at the compliment.

"I know exactly what you mean, Mrs. Lee," said Hilda, "at the end of such a function the hostess knows just how an orange ought to feel when it is separated into sections—that is, naturally enough divided, but helplessly scattered."

"One always wonders what he is going to talk about at a reception," sighed father.

"Conversation substance, like manna, seems to come by miracle," answered Hilda.

*Tedium then  
Te Deum*

*Manna for  
conversation*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"And occasionally the miracle is not a miraculous success," ventured I.

"The whole social outfit is a regular fencing match," declared Joe, and I knew he was thinking of Millie.

"In that case it is a pity that the fencing rules do not obtain so that when we are hit we might put a finger on the spot and cry, 'touché' or 'passé' or 'trop bas!'" added Tom sympathetically.

*A game without rules* "It is a game without rules and without umpire," responded Joe feelingly, and Tom continued:

"The true skill of the game lies in experiencing and ignoring."

"Surely," said I, "it is far easier to ignore than to raise one's voice and howl, is n't it?"

"Yes," said Tom, "and it sometimes requires more bravery to run away than it does to stay and fight."

*The people with a sense of humor* "People with a sense of humor have no business to get into the social world," declared Ma Belle.

"True," added father, "the people without a sense of humor are the happiest and there-

## A DINNER PARTY AND A CALLER

fore better fitted for association with their kind."

"The compensation of those who have a sense of humor lies in a special development of the vertebral column which enables them to bear unhappiness with keener zest than the matter-of-fact experience in happiness," remarked Hilda, and I said with some severity:

"Hilda, I am sure you have cultivated your humorous vertebræ to that extent that they wag you."

"There be those whom I will refrain from mentioning who have beautiful, long, graceful *A vertebral Watteau plait* Watteau plaits instead of backbones," she replied, and I had to join the laugh.

"My poor amiability is a target for all my friends to try their skill upon," I exclaimed ruefully.

"Little skill is required, dear," said Hilda as she put a loving arm around my waist, "your amiability envelopes us all like a mantle of charity, and we love to cuddle down in it even if we do abuse it."

"Daughter, I could not manage my recep-

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*An easy person* tion at all without you there to pour oil on the creaking axles," and Ma Belle looked affectionately at me as she said it. "On judgment day you will be able to say, 'O Judge, I have been mighty easy for your earthly creatures to get along with, and there must be place in the heavenly machinery for lubricator as well as for cranks.'"

*Flinty inside* "Marnie is n't so dead easy as you all seem to think," declared Joe feelingly, "you would sing a different tune if she had brought you-all up. She is flinty inside though she appears so soft and cushiony, I can tell you that right now." Father looked at Joe with a twinkle of mischief in his eye, and said:

"Did I not hear you say the other day, my son, in the presence of a certain young person, that when you married you were going to marry a woman who rested you. You had best be careful, now that you know pillows may be filled with other things than down."

"By jingo! I would rather marry a buzz-saw than a feather bed any day," was Joe's rather belligerent answer; then feeling that

## A DINNER PARTY AND A CALLER

he had perhaps cast some reflections upon me, he added,

"Marnie, you are an angel, even if you are not a down-pillow, and an angel is a darn fine person to have around."

"If all of you do not stop teasing me, I will take my dolls and leave," I complained.

"Dont!" pleaded Tom, "Stay, and I will be an angel too, so you wont be so lonesome."

Now, Image with long sagacious ears, I must confess to you that I was teased by this conversation. I know I enjoy being praised, yet praise slides off me like water from the back of the traditional duck. My faults and my virtues are dovetailed together so perfectly that a coat of blame or praise spread upon me is likely to be applied to the wrong spot and no one realizes the fact as keenly as I do. But this is also true—the less I believe in myself, the more I long to have others believe in me. Human nature is so naïve! Consciousness of failure does not prevent us from feeling that we ought to have all the perquisites of success. Tell me, is it a subject

*Naïve human  
nature*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

for laughter or tears, this unreasonable human nature which is so absurd ! But how can you know, since you are merely a god !

JANUARY 3RD :—Good evening, Wooden Ser-  
*The dynamics  
of crossness* enity, how are you to-night ? As for me, my day began stupid but I redeemed it to wickedness. It was a day of cross-purposes and has a cross lady at the end of it. Cross-ness is a queer emotion ; it is like a real force within one which explodes ; it is as if one's nerves were all tied in hard knots and then suddenly loosed. Queer creatures, we mortals, —each one of us just a colony of nerves which may go on a strike at any moment. Believe me, there are some advantages in being composed of placid teak-wood.

*A gift of the  
gods* Theodore Morris arrived in town at eight this morning and at ten he was calling on me. Well is he named Theodore, for he is surely a gift of the gods ; it is the only possible way to explain him.

He came forward to meet me as I entered the room, took both my hands and my only safety lay in looking distinctly non-kissable.

## A DINNER PARTY AND A CALLER

He certainly does feel and reflect my moods with startling readiness. But some day his strong individuality will rise up and overflow my moods as a river its banks ; I know it ! He drew up two easy chairs in front of the fire ; seating me in one, he stretched out luxuriously in the other.

“ My lady, you are looking fine this morning ; you are like an oriental princess in that crimson embroidered creation you are wearing.”

“ Did you ever hear of an oriental princess who had gray locks and was forty years old ? ” I asked rather acidly.

“ Oh, there are certain advantages possessed by oriental princesses of which we may not have heard,” he answered smoothly. I was silent and looked steadily into the fire and he asked :

“ Of what are you thinking ? ”

“ I never think any more ; the longer one lives the thicker come the brickbats of experience about one’s ears and one is obliged *Why we may not think* to keep dodging and stop thinking.”

“ My lady is a pessimist this morning.”

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

“ Some one says that a pessimist is one who has seen an optimist,” returned I pointedly.

“ Look at me well, then, for I am he ; I am happy and as serene as a June sky.”

“ How have you achieved it ?”

“ Oh, it is a plan. I go about the world like a waiter in a dining-car with my feet wide apart to guard against an upset. I make my base unnaturally broad so as to stand the jar and not lose my balance nor spill over, whatever happens.”

“ So that is your philosophy of life !”

*A philosophy of life like a bicycle*  
“ No, I have n’t any. A philosophy of life is like a bicycle ; it goes well on the level and down hill and over good roads ; but with the up-hill and the mud, one must needs get off and push. However, one does not need a philosophy in heaven, where I am this morning.”

“ I see no golden streets, and hear no harp-strings vibrating,” I returned perversely.

“ Why should the two senses of sight and hearing persist in the next world, and the senses of touch, taste and smell be lost ?”

“ Because the two former take us outside

## A DINNER PARTY AND A CALLER

of ourselves and the latter keep us within  
ourselves."

"Happy thought, dear lady, but why not picture heaven as a place of soft fabrics, velvety and satiny textures and downy cushions; and also a place of delectable viands and above all, of enrapturing odors, heliotrope, violet and rose. Why, the fragrance of English violets takes me out of myself as much as does a Beethoven sonata; and to touch your garment is heaven for me," he laid his finger on my sleeve; and I was silent, pondering on this utterly inexplicable power of another personality to touch and awaken unsuspected sides of one's nature.

*The senses  
needed in  
heaven*

"It is all a dream," I answered.

"I have worked hard for this wide-awake world, and it owes me at least a dream," he said softly as his hand clasped mine. "I remember that some one has said that only the tangible is frangible, the impalpable abides."

*Only the  
impalpable  
abides*

We heard Hilda's voice outside; his hand slid off mine like smoke, and he arose alert and courtly to greet her. Though I was in a state of inner embarrassment I knew

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

I was calm in appearance, and greeted her placidly. It is my way to be calm on the crust when I am seething beneath.

"Why are you two cooped up here this morning, when the outside world is so glorious?" she asked breezily.

"We are loafing. What have you been doing these two days?" I asked.

"Me! I have been busy getting back into things again and I have so many interests that I feel like this nice scorpion on your oriental rug, as if I had a claw hooked on each of the eight corners of the universe."

"Her universe is an octagon," murmured *Mr. Morris*, "and I could have sworn that it *universe* was square."

"Thank you," replied Hilda, "four sides more than you divined. I am not surprised! Well, yesterday I went to church to see Jeannie Harvey married."

"A cheerful pastime; what did you think about during the ceremony?" I asked.

*The new marriage ritual* "I meditated on the futility of vows, and concluded I should make the ritual say 'I take thee, Jeannie, to be my wedded wife and

## A DINNER PARTY AND A CALIER

to get along with as best I can as long as I can.””

“My goodness ! ” I ejaculated.

“Do not be profane,” warned Hilda.

“There is so little of it that the oath is a mild one,” I explained.

“Often there is enough of it to swear at,” she answered pointedly.

“Please let my goodness rest and tell us what else you have been doing.”

“I am sure you have heard me say that I wished I were a Digger squaw, when the burden of being respectable became too onerous. Last night I was not respectable without the trouble of transmigrating, for I went to hear the ‘Lord Trillions.’ ”

“Rather light opera,” laughed Mr. Morris.

“Light-headed but not light-hearted ; the music worthless, the dancing infamous, and the humor, horse-play. No real Digger squaw could have been induced to sit through it. I am more sure than ever that when I take my final leave of respectability, I shall take to the woods and savagery rather than to the footlights and decadence.”

*Savagery  
preferable to  
decadence*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"You look fresh and happy this morning," suggested Mr. Morris admiringly.

*Joe in the rôle of Columbus*

"That is because Joe chanced to overtake me this morning when I was carrying a basket of eatables to poor Bridget Carnahan. Joe is always an inspiration to me; no one encourages me in the path of virtue as he does. Whenever he discovers me doing anything commendable, he is so pleased and enthusiastic that I feel as abashed as if I had never done a good deed before. Most of my friends take it for granted that I am likely to display certain virtues, but he, never! He discovers them anew every time; Joe is the Columbus of my virtues."

"I thought I was the Columbus of your virtues, because I make them stand on end by making them boil," said I.

*Sterilized virtues*

"Boiling virtues must sterilize them," remarked Mr. Morris thoughtfully.

"Go a step farther and make them anti-septic. What a safe and attractive place this world would be if it were the abode of anti-septic virtues," quoth Hilda.

"Virtue is mostly inertia," said Mr. Morris.

## A DINNER PARTY AND A CALLER

"So is vice," I added.

"Virtue is commendable when it is worn inside, like the pearl in the oyster, and not on the outside like the quills on the fretful porcupine," adjured Hilda.

"Many a time have I been impaled thereon," I murmured.

"It was your just deserts; you are so soft that impalement is inevitable," said Hilda looking at me affectionately.

"Miss Vincent, when shall we give Mrs. Lee another concert? I have not touched my *His heart's desire* heart's desire for three weeks, and I long to have it in my hands again."

"How fortunate to be able to buy one's heart's desire at any price!" exclaimed Hilda.

"Mine cost me more than I was willing to pay, for it belonged to my old teacher, Herr Stainer, and I purchased it from his heirs. Half the happiness of owning it was lost because he was gone."

"The world drives hard bargains," said Hilda with unexpected sympathy.

"Strange, is it not," said I, "how happiness *The relativity of happiness* is meted out to us by making us choose be-

**CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL**  
tween the greater and lesser hurts. Joy never  
seems to be perfect ; it is joy simply by con-  
trast."

" I refuse to listen to such cynical remarks,"  
said the gentleman, rising to go, " I fear if I  
stay I shall become inoculated," and he bade  
us a cheerful farewell. But was n't it a queer  
conversation ?

## CHAPTER XV

### A SOCIAL FUNCTION WHICH WAS TRULY SOCIAL

JANUARY 10TH :—It is 1 o'clock A.M. and the bell in the tower is telling it abroad over the starlit valley. There are receptions and *receptions*, oh, hand-carved god ! Ma Belle's belong to the latter class and all others to the former. Ma Belle knows how to get interesting people out and how to make uninteresting people interesting. Although it is so late, I am too excited to sleep. My thoughts and feelings seem to be whirling around many storm centers like a compound cyclone ; so I think I will tell you all about Ma Belle's reception, and perhaps that will make me sleepy, especially if you look weary and bored.

You should have seen Ma Belle to-night and her house too, for then you could better understand what I have to tell you about this wonderful party. Ma Belle was clad in a

*Ma Belle's  
reception*

*The manage-  
ment of  
trains*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*The ideal hostess* creamy velvet robe that trailed after her tall and almost girlishly slender form as if it loved to. Some women just haul their trains after them by brute force ; while others wear trains which flow after them with the sinuous gracefulness of a stream gladly flowing seaward. Ma Belle wears the latter kind always. To-night the rich old lace on her corsage was the background for one large, perfect, pale-pink rose. Her beautiful white hair was crowned with a wide comb of delicately wrought silver. Her cheeks were flushed and her dark eyes ablaze with excitement. Oh yes, Ma Belle has some wrinkles in her face, since you are so impolite as to ask ; but they are of the right sort—simply the delicate outlines of character. If she had one wrinkle less, she would be so much the less beautiful. No other woman present could compare with her in attractiveness. When she greeted people, she said some little word that made each guest *feel received*. Ma Belle is like a diamond, she has a different facet to sparkle under the ray of every individual she meets.

Ma Belle's is the most interesting house that

## A TRULY SOCIAL FUNCTION

I was ever in. It is a long, low house on a hill, and consists of a series of large, comfortable, homey rooms. There is no library in it, but there are fire-places with great comfortable chairs in front of them; and books are scattered over the house, almost every corner affording place for a bookshelf cunningly contrived to entice the book lover. Ma Belle says she would not dream of segregating her books in one room any more than she would her friends. She says that books do not like to have other incompatible books in their neighborhood, and that she can imagine the suffering that would result from placing Kipling by the side of Matthew Arnold, or Stevenson by Jane Austen; she says that most libraries impress her with an atmosphere of mute endurance. Thus it happens that in Ma Belle's home there are congenial books and congenial pictures, and here and there a piece of statuary, like the "Narcissus" and the "Winged Victory." It is quite impossible for any one to be stiff and formal in such a sympathetic atmosphere, and that is the reason, I think, why almost every one

*The ideal house*  
*Incompatible volumes*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

I talked with to-night said real, and interesting things to me. No matter what sort of people Ma Belle brings together, they never form that impossible combination which is like soup seasoned with tea, and which is too often encountered on the social menu.

An undesirable combination through the conservatory with Professor Mayhew, who is cultured and thoughtful and has soulful eyes, and yet is impersonal to a degree that would make a disembodied ghost envious. As I grow older, I have a higher appreciation of impersonal attitudes and opinions. I am getting so that I can converse vivaciously with an idea whether it be male, female, or neuter, or whether it be on two legs or six. He was saying:

"As the years go by we realize that life is so crowded that it is impossible to attain much development; most of our powers lie dormant because we do not have time to do ourselves justice. We are like 'laboring' students, we have to spend so much time earning the bread of life that we do not have

## A TRULY SOCIAL FUNCTION

time to study our lessons and make the brilliant showing we ought."

"Let us hope that the Recording Angel has a different marking system than we have," I ventured comfortingly; "we focus on the exceptional; if we do our lessons very well or very badly, we think about these occasions with pride or shame; but the greatest Teacher must take into account the average work, day by day, and let latent possibilities count for something. Any one can easily see that no life may be measured by its failures and still have excuse for existence. Failure is negative and we should be judged by our positive achievements."

*A superior system of marking*

"I grant you that, but a talent in a napkin is useless no matter who knows that it is there. My ideal of heaven is a place where there is time and incentive for us each to grow to full stature in every possibility. I always think of these things when I come to Madam Lee's, because it seems to me that she has achieved on earth all that I hope to in heaven."

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

He was right. That defines Ma Belle perfectly—she is the woman who has achieved.

My next encounter was with Marvin Gray, *Ocidental* a keen, placid and most handsome Quaker, a friend of Ma Belle from childhood. You do not know what I mean by Quaker do you? Well, a Quaker is the embodiment of occidental instead of oriental placidity—a person who reckons with the fates and refuses to be disturbed by the results. Not a stoic, nay, nay! A stoic is one who says when his heart aches, "Let it ache!" and endures. A Quaker says, "I will regard only the spirit; I will flow around the obstacles in my path like water, always obeying the inner, divine mandate, and not waste my strength in useless rebellion, but use all experience for growth in grace." I have always enjoyed Marvin Gray because his presence enfolds me like a mantle of rest; and he talks to me in the sweet "plain" language which my mother used. I greeted him with :

"I have not seen thee until now to wish thee a happy new year; may the coming year bring thee fulfilment of thy dearest wish."

## A TRULY SOCIAL FUNCTION

"Thee should have made certain about the nature of the wish before thee said that," he returned in a sweet and resonant voice. "I do not believe it would be good for any one to get his dearest wish. I shall wish more wisely for thee: May thy dearest wish ever keep thy heart warm and hopeful by never being fulfilled. Fulfilment is death to a wish, and I would keep thy dearest wish in the blossom stage, a source of interest and inspiration for a long time before it reaches fruition."

"I am afraid thee thinks that small crops are all I deserve; too many of my wishes are all petals and no fruit," I answered ruefully.

"Thee is not yet old enough to appreciate the value of wishes unfulfilled," said he, a sweet smile breaking the firm contour of his lips. "It is only while we are longing for what may not be that we can live close to humanity and still keep our sympathies fresh for our fellow men."

I looked up into the depths of his calm gray eyes and wondered if that had been the secret of his own noble life of helpfulness.

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

We were interrupted and I passed on conscious of an inner glow, as if his sunshine had ripened the side of me that was turned toward him.

Next there fell to my lot a callow psychologist who was not a very promising social object. I was pushed to the straits of shocking him by declaring myself an apostle of mediocrity. He evidently considered himself so unusual that my words were nothing less than heresy. While I was enjoying his discomfiture, Dr. McGregor joined us, and my companion turned with relief and evident reverence to the head of his department. Dr. McGregor is really a great man; and I have always thought it a pity that he should be sailing his boat on philosophy's stagnant pool where his own thinking must ever be mirrored in the murky depths of what others have thought. For he is a man to be out in the sea of positive action, buffeting wind and wave and all there is for a strong man to buffet; but now his buffeting is all within himself, and his delicately lined face and restless eyes show it."

*The murky depths of the thought of ages*

"I am glad you have come," I exclaimed,

## A TRULY SOCIAL FUNCTION

"I hope you will help me to convince this young man of the true worth of the extraordinarily ordinary; and that there is very little use for the exceptional in this old world-cushion; help me to reveal to him the great value of mere stuffing."

*The great  
value of the  
ordinary*

"No use! Leave him to find the value of it after he realizes he is it, as all the rest of us have done. First we dream we are the 'stuff,' and finally in raw humility learn to add the 'ing.' Come with me, I want to show you something." As we passed on he continued, "You were wasting your breath! And, my dear girl, you ought to realize that wisdom born of experience has in it the ring of cynicism when it is repeated for the edification of the innocent."

"It is the only way to get even with the teacher," said I. "He irritated me; and I am not a 'dear girl,' I am becoming truly aged, and this is the evidence of it: Once every human being was an object of breathless interest to me. Now I call some stupid, some tiresome and some with half-baked ideals, irritating."

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

“Wait a little, if he *will* live, he *must* learn.

*Ideals a goad instead of an inspiration* Too soon his ideals will cease their work as inspiration and begin that of tormentors. Instead of leading him, they will get behind and goad him upward, making progress a pain instead of a joy.”

*Perfect frankness not a perfect success* I made no answer, for Dr. McGregor always compliments my comprehension of him by talking to me with an appalling frankness. And after such a bitter speech as that I always feel that I would not be so frank even to the Lord in my prayers. No amount of sympathy or imagination can change *ego* to *tu*, and therefore absolute frankness is never a perfect success.

*A Buddha from Mandalay* He led me to the “Indian corner” of Ma Belle’s study. There is a luxurious divan covered with silk, embroidered with stripes of barbarous yellow; in front of it stretches a great tiger skin, the snarling jaws and cruel eyes of the mounted head rebelling openly against the peaceful service of a foot-stool. At the end of the divan is a book-case which I carved for Ma Belle with a design of elephant heads. On its shelves are various his-

## A TRULY SOCIAL FUNCTION

tories of India, books of oriental religions and philosophy, and a set of Kipling's writings, while on the top is a reclining Buddha carved in alabaster ; above him is suspended a peacock-feather punkah with its myriad eyes.

"Help me to admire this Buddha," he commanded.

"He came from Mandalay," I explained.

"Look once at the graceful crudity of him and his gold embroidered toga and his elaborate cap adorning his traditionally swollen head."

"Yes, that extra head of Buddha's looks like a coiffure and Madam Lee is driven almost wild by people who ask 'Who is she?'"

"She, indeed!" he ejaculated in scorn.  
"Never *she* even though he has round cheeks and leans serenely his head upon his hand. That inscrutable smile and the mysterious eyes that see Nirvana prove him Buddha. He says as plainly as may be, 'I see all things as they *are*; and you, O mortals, know no more of what *is* than do the ants in yonder mound know of the movements of the stars.'"

"He is made of alabaster; let me place a

*A Nirvana  
smile*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

light behind him and you will see that he is translucent," exclaimed I, for I was very proud of this Buddha.

*The advantage of translucent Divinity* "To have a God one can see through, even dimly, must be a comfort," muttered the man at my side.

Ma Belle says of Dr. McGregor that he thinks too much ; that he is like a horse fallen in the harness—the only way to get him on his feet is to sit on his head ; that if he would only go out and work with a spade and pick-axe for a year he would be the sweetest and sanest of men.

*Excrescent crudition* As I drifted away from Dr. McGregor I found myself consciously veering to the left because I saw Professor Plumb advancing at the right. Professor Plumb is regarded as a very learned man, but his learning is no real part of himself—it is an abnormal growth ; and although I am somewhat facile in performing social feats, I never did feel at ease while conversing with an excrescence. So I steered my course toward a big man whose massive head, crowned with tousled curls, towered above the assemblage. He is

## A TRULY SOCIAL FUNCTION

Mr. Walton who lives on a great farm near our town. There is something about him that is vigorous and virile and makes me always conscious that he is a man. He is on the most intimate terms with Mother Nature, so I touched his arm and said :

“ What are you doing in the madding crowd, you who belong out among the trees ? ”

“ Wishing that men were trees,” was the prompt reply.

“ And women ? ”

“ Birds,” he returned cheerfully.

“ Ducks or geese ? ” I queried.

“ You are a bad lady, and if you are not careful, I will wish you into a blue jay.”

“ Why ? ” I remonstrated.

“ Because you have on such a heavenly blue gown and have such bad manners.”

“ My gown is n’t blue, it is gray.”

“ It is just the bluish shimmering color that is on the blue jay’s wing,” he declared positively.

“ Egotist ! ” I upbraided, “ to set yourself up to judge of my manners.”

*A child of  
Nature*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Obnoxious egotism* “Egotism is all right,” he argued, “when it looks you square in the eye and refuses to budge. It is obnoxious only when it is rampant self-conceit, or when it turns tail and sneaks off. The very worst of egotists are those whose egotism is always skulking around afraid of being kicked.” I laughed appreciatively, and said :

“Let’s not talk about folk; let’s talk about trees instead. What news have you of them ?”

*The latest news of the trees* “The latest news I got from the mountain yesterday; there I observed that old hemlocks are hopeless pessimists and young hemlocks are cheerful optimists. I saw an old one and a young one standing side by side; there was a dreary drooping of the boughs of the old one as if in memory of years of snow storms; a sullen attitude as if the corners of its mouth were drawn down in stoical disbelief of the world. While the young one lifted its pretty branches eagerly upward, as if longing for all that the world can give, even of snow.”

“I told you to talk of trees, not men.”

## A TRULY SOCIAL FUNCTION

" You are impertinent, Madam Blue Jay ; I am telling the truth about trees ; because it happens to be a human truth also is not of the slightest moment to me."

" Come over to the music room, I hear some singing," I urged.

" Not I," he declared with disdain.

" Music hath its charms to soothe the savage breast," I said warningly.

" By that same token I am no savage," he *Not a savage breast* answered with a laugh as he passed on.

On the way to the music room I was stopped by Mr. Day, the artist, who is a most fascinating individual—sympathetic, responsive, impulsive and capricious—a child in all things save experience. He is very dependent on his strong, serene wife ; and in some way the golden thread of her love has guided her through the maze of his infinite unexpectedness. *The artistic temperament*

" How is the last picture coming on ?" I asked.

" Nothing doing !" he answered despondently.

" What is the subject ?"

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

“ Oh, the same old landscape ; I cannot do anything else. Life is like an echo cave ; we stand at the entrance in glad youth and shout ; and all that comes after is simply reverberation, echo after echo, each time fainter until the end is reached.”

“ I judge from that remark that you have reached the crisis,” I replied understandingly.

“ That is the worst of it ; I am getting so *Nonpareil* that all of my crises are spelled in plain *crises* nonpareil instead of italics or pica ; life is scarcely worth the trouble when one’s crises are set up in nonpareil.”

“ I know what is the matter with you,” I cried, “ the Lady Day has gone off for a visit.”

“ Yes,” he answered with a brilliant smile, “ Annie Laurie is away, and I have arrived at that stage of dumb commonplaceness that I wrote her a letter this morning telling her I loved her, and blotted it, by Jove, with a blotter advertising royal salad dressing. Was n’t that the limit ?”

“ She is a wonderful woman,” I said with enthusiasm.

## A TRULY SOCIAL FUNCTION

"No words to describe her with! Among her other qualities she is a natural gambler; *A charming gambler* the source and advent of the next dollar is to give her an occasion of perennial joy and interest. She is Helen of Troy and Pierpont Morgan combined."

"With such a wife you do not need to make any resolutions for the new year," I said with an attempt at gaiety. But he refused to be cheered and went on:

"Is n't it alarming how all our fine plans and promises to ourselves slip out of our grasp like a handful of sand—the harder we hold it the more it sifts between the fingers; the more tightly we grasp the more we feel it ooze, becoming less and less?"

"You are tired to-night," I said soothingly.

"That's so," he acquiesced cheerfully, "I am tired and I long to rest for months with nothing to do except to trifle in pastels with the colors of God's world and listen to Cleopatra sing. If I could do that I should soon get my head back on my shoulders. Of late I have been doing my work with my hands *The futile use of a head*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

and meanwhile towing my head around after me at the end of a string, which is a damn futile way to use a head. There, don't be shocked ! I have to swear once in a while ; and I might as well for I am bound eventually to suffer the tortures of the wicked and what is even worse—the oblivion of the unfit."

" Wait until the Queen of Sheba returns and brings you back your pink spectacles."

" Pink spectacles are made of the pigment  
*The composition of pink spectacles* of red blood corpuscles, did you know that ? And my red corpuscles have gone on a strike leaving the white ones in possession, and that is why my world is all clay color."

" Just like the wabbly clay marbles that I used to pat up, and which always cracked when I baked them," I murmured sympathetically.

" By jingo ! you are almost as nice as the *Compelling music* Czarina," he replied gratefully. Meanwhile we had been pushing music-ward, and arrived in time to hear the last line of a song and the polite patter of applause which followed. Then I heard the tentative tuning of a violin, and when we gained sight of the piano there

## A TRULY SOCIAL FUNCTION

sat Hilda looking as pleasant as a May morning, and Theodore Morris pointing at something on the sheet of music before her with his bow ; in a moment they broke with a fine swing into a Schubert sonata. So well they played that silence fell on the chattering assembly, a tribute not always paid to music at our receptions.

“ Who is that man ? ” asked Mr. Day, when the last strain of music had died away, leaving us all satisfied and silent before we remembered to spoil it all by applauding in our noisy American way.

“ His name is Morris, and he is a special friend of Joe’s,” I answered nonchalantly.

“ He looks too sleek to make such music ; but, by Jove, he must have an artistic upset *Internally* inside, quite out of sight,” declared he. We were approached by Mrs. Durland, petite and vivacious. Mr. Walton says that when she cocks her little head on one side and looks at him, he always expects her to say, “ chick-a-dee-dee.”

“ Is n’t that man a miracle ! ” she asked, her bright eyes dancing.

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"Why a miracle?" exclaimed I.

"I always maintained than nothing short of a miracle would make Hilda Vincent play in public, so it is evident that he is it."

"I think my mamma-in-law is the miracle  
*The origin of* in this instance," I averred.

*the miracle* "Don't be too sure! I never saw Hilda look so radiant as she does to-night," replied Mrs. Durland.

"Dressed as she is in a soft white cloud, she looks like a blooming angel," mused the artist. Hilda was smiling back at all the congratulating people gathered around her, and was introducing Mr. Morris right and left; and I could imagine his wholly empty and trite replies to their praises. As the twain came toward us, I stepped forward extending a hand to each.

"It was surely a great triumph, for you stilled the multitude," I said warmly.

*Hilda's*  
*concert tour* "I am so excited," replied Hilda, "that I am meditating a concert tour; even now I can see my hand bills twining around telephone poles and climbing board fences."

"I hope you will take me along, Miss Vincent," said Mr. Morris, lackadaisically.

## A TRULY SOCIAL FUNCTION

"Oh, no, you are too dangerous a rival," cried Hilda, "all that applause was yours tonight. I could n't think of taking an eclipse along, it would n't be professional."

Mr. Day and Mr. Morris talked together for a few moments while Hilda, Mrs. Durland and I chatted. Afterwards when Mr. Day passed on with me he asked :

"Of what sort of stuff is that fiddler of yours made anyway?"

"I have never tested his composition," I answered with conscious irritation. "Shall we go and get some litmus paper to see whether it turns blue or red in his vicinity?"

"I should say he was made of asbestos and stuffed with ice," rejoined Mr. Day speculatively. Then Mrs. Walton joined us ; she is a small lady with a most expressive face, and a tired little wrinkle between her languorous dark eyes. Mrs. Walton has a nestful of children, but we never get tired of hearing her tell about them, for she has a sense of humor as well as a sense of perspective which most parents seem to lack when talking about their children. So we hastened to ask her for the latest bit of news of her brood.

*Asbestos and  
ice*  
*A sense of  
humor  
pleasing in a  
parent*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*An unrepentant sinner* "I do not know what to do with Gertrude," said she in a plaintive, child-like voice. "However bad she is, she never repents. She may be led to concede that she will never commit a particular sin again, but I think she is always glad that she committed it once ; she regards every naughty act as just that much treasure laid up in spite of fate and me. Yesterday she and Dorothy were very naughty, and I placed each in a corner, face to the wall and told them to stand there until they felt repentant. Dorothy can always repent as soon as she is hurt, so she was soon free. But Gertrude remained obdurate until she swayed and tottered from standing so long ; I felt sorry for her and thought I would help her by prompting her conscience into immediate activity, so I asked, 'Gertrude, do you not feel miserable ?' 'Nowhere 'cept in my legs,' promptly replied the hardened little sinner." There was a certain subdued quality in the laughter which followed this story. So many of us had experienced that sort of repentance ourselves.

## CHAPTER XVI

### MENTAL AND PHYSICAL REFRESHMENTS

JANUARY 10TH (*Continued*) :—I saw Professor Wolcott coming toward me, smiling as ever. Professor Wolcott considers the world too infinitesimal to scowl at. When he reached me he proffered me his arm and said :

“Come, Mrs. Lee, there are several delectable things in the dining room that were fore-ordained from the beginning of the world to refresh you and me.” I went with him gladly ; there is something about Professor Wolcott that touches the deeps, even if the conversation remains in the shallows.

“I have not seen you for a long time,” said I, “tell me the news of yourself, and how you are enjoying your work, and what you do for play, and all about everything.”

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"Work is going very well," he answered,  
*Well sculptured ignorance* his fine face lighting up. "I have most satisfactory classes; and though I dare not hope that I have set up within the minds of my pupils altars of enlightenment, yet I fondly believe that I have chiseled their ignorance into more picturesque forms and more interesting shapes."

"Education for most of us, I fear, means erosion instead of building up," I answered with an appreciative laugh, "there is not much difference between teacher and pupil, between youth and age in that respect—is there? Do you know of any differences between youth and age in any respect, if so please tell me what they are?"

"One difference is that when we are young *How age differs from youth* it seems difficult to really live anything, life seems so far beyond us, so out of reach, as if it were at the end of the rainbow. But when we are old it is difficult for us not to live all things, we are so intimate with living. When we are young there is a wide chasm between dreaming and living; but when we are old and life gets worn in its bearings, the ma-

## MENTAL REFRESHMENTS

chnery goes so easily that our dreams materialize while we are dreaming them."

"That is because our dreams come to be limited and narrowed to the bounds of sordid possibility. I often think that it would have simplified matters if we could all have been cut from the same pattern—like these champagne wafers, for instance."

"We are, and that is another difference between youth and age. Youth deems itself cut after a unique pattern, while age feels a kinship to all the world and looks askance at the unique."

"Like Joe's description of an entertainment last night—he averred that it was 'awfully unique.'"

"Great Scott! What are you people doing, anyway, mixing philosophy with ice-cream," said Tom's voice behind us. "I call it the height of egotism to philosophize while eating."

"Certainly it is," rejoined Professor Wollcott, "a good healthy ego is able at any *A healthy* time to pat its stomach with one hand and *ego* rub its head with the other."

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"We were discussing the very personal topic of growing old," I explained.

*Life grows bald* to say on that subject?" asked Tom super-  
iorly. "Now I know something about it; I discovered that something was the matter with life not long since, and upon investigating found that it was merely growing bald. Hard, bare facts are no longer disguised by the perfumed and curly locks of youth; but they appear now in all their prominences and depressions like the plaster model of the phrenologist."

"Will you cover it with a skull cap of philosophy or a wig of optimism?" asked Professor Wolcott.

"A halo of glamour, if you please," answered Tom. "By the way, Professor, I heard *a halo of glamour* the interesting news yesterday that you were writing a book."

"Yes," admitted the accused, "the mania of the century was upon me and I felt that I should go sane if I did not straightway write a book."

"What is it about?" queried L.

## MENTAL REFRESHMENTS

“Man.”

“Ethnological rather than humanitarian,” I hazarded.

“Why do you say that?” he demanded with asperity “*my* interest in humanity is almost inhuman at times.”

“I do not see how you find time to write books,” I argued. “I do not see how any professor in a live college finds time for writing. Father said yesterday that his work was so in arrears that it was heaped mountain-high on all sides of him, and Joe irreverently advised that he burrow in it and hibernate like a woodchuck. I should like to have you tell me where you found the time and energy to write a book.”

*How  
professors  
may write  
books*

“All things take time and energy,” he argued, “even keeping still and resting require time and energy.”

“The energy being mainly directed to warding off interruptions,” suggested I. “It seems to me that our day and generation are singularly unproductive of thought. We are all so busy with actual living that there is little chance for thought to take toll.”

*Life too rapid  
for thought  
to take toll*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

“That’s right,” said Tom, “most of us go through the day as if we were shot from a gun; not only shot but with a screw motion, so that we bore our way through the business of the day without let or hindrance.”

“And when the work of the day is children,” chimed in Mrs. Walton who had been listening, “one has the added task of dodging all obstacles when speeding like a ball, which is manifestly not the nature of projectiles.”

As we left the dining-room, Tom and I drifted off together. “I have not seen you since New Year’s,” said I reproachfully. “I hope that none of your vows were made for the purpose of excluding me.”

“I seriously considered the making of such a vow, but broke it before I made it, which was a prompt conservation of energy,” he replied. I had not expected he would say just this, and I went on, hurriedly :

“What a pity that the years cannot be sliced completely apart at the New Year like pieces of bread !

“The first order of the New Year is to proceed with the unfinished business, always.

## **MENTAL REFRESHMENTS**

“Like weaving a pattern, one must always finish what one has been foolish enough to begin, and put the finishing touches to the figure, no matter how tired one may be of it.”

“Mercy on us, Marian, what have you been doing that you speak of it in that lugubrious tone!”

“Nothing at all, just thinking,” I answered guardedly.

“Thinking about things is most confoundedly disagreeable, usually,” he replied with unction. “One could be so cheerfully sinful, if it were not for thinking about it. Thinking is worse than conscience ; conscience is only concerned with ethics and altruism, while thinking includes these and also the consciousness of the spectacle one is making of one’s self meanwhile.”

*Thinking  
worse than  
conscience*

“Yes, that is just it,” complained I. “Being bad is not uncomfortable, it is too often sheer joy ; it is the getting to be good again that hurts, just as coming to consciousness after drowning is agonizing.”

*The agonizing  
moment of  
the wicked*

“How did you happen to find that out? You never ‘came to,’ you know you never did.”

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"Tom, I am 'coming to' this minute ; we are both bad, for here we stand talking our own talk when Ma Belle especially commanded that we 'mingle.'"

"I have mingled to-night with so much *Social dilution* energy and enthusiasm that already I feel diluted, and am a mere trituration of my own self. However, I will do as I am bid, and will go and mingle some more," grumbled Tom as he left me.

I passed on, meeting and stopping to speak *Under-currents* to many, and almost unconsciously avoiding others. Strange and unmapped are the under-currents of the social sea, that flow straight from one individual to another and yet seem never to touch other individuals at all. Some whom I met I compassed, and to some I was barely tangent and was more than satisfied with merest tangency. I had almost reached the music room again when a firm hand took my arm from behind and the voice of Theodore Morris murmured in my ear :

"You are working too hard to-night, my lady, come with me for a moment and rest." He drew my arm through his and led me to a

## MENTAL REFRESHMENTS

window seat, away from the throng. As he piled soft cushions behind me he continued, "Now rest; you need not say a word, and I will talk stupid talk which will require no mental effort, on your part, as listener."

"I am tired!" I acknowledged as I leaned back luxuriously, "I am tired in that queer, *Politeness* quivery fashion which comes when one's *fatigued* politeness aches from steady strain. I wish I knew more about the polite nerves and muscles; I can feel them in my anatomy but I do not know where they are exactly. I sometimes get so tired that I wish I were made of *papier maché* like Dr. Wilde's manikin, so that I could take myself apart and lay each piece off by itself to rest. You have had a pleasant evening I hope!"

"If I have not, there was good reason for it and I am making up for it now. As I saw *Gayety minus verve* you pass from one to another to-night, smiling and sparkling and so eagerly sought, I felt old—a hundred years old and worn out. I have been meditating on the futility of gayety when the verve has gone out of it. By Jove, it is too much like beer which has stood long

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

in the open glass; it is not good enough to drink for pleasure and it is too mild to effect nausea. It is simply colossally insipid. All the evening I have had the feeling of alleged pleasure. To act the part well enough to deceive others is easy; but to act so well that one's self is deceived is rather difficult."

"Except when the red light is turned on," I interrupted.

*A stimulant* "Yes, red light is a bracer," he admitted.

"I do not like what you have been saying the least bit," I remonstrated. "Everyone ought to be deliriously happy at Madam Lee's reception."

"The fault is with myself," he hastened to say, "Madam Lee is superb; had I been able to remain in her neighborhood I must certainly have lived up to my privileges. The trouble is I struck an arid place to-night."

*Arid places* "Did you ever notice that sometimes the outlook is just teeming with interest; and then some morning one awakes to find the whole thing bare, stale, flat and unprofitable. One day the scenery is all high mountains, and the next it is all sand dunes. And I have

## MENTAL REFRESHMENTS

been wandering among sand dunes all day.” I looked at him for a moment perplexed, and then said provokingly, with obvious condescension :

“ Poor boy ! It is almost as hard to get ready to live as it is to live, is n’t it ? ”

“ You are naughty, my lady, and you know it ; and you ought to be punished,” he said, half angry and half laughing.

“ It is punishment enough to know that you have been so miserable,” I answered softly. He looked comforted and took the seat at my side.

“ You are skilled in the art of kissing the place to make it well. I am at this moment having a perfectly blissful time. My lady, you are entrancing in that gown ! If you had let me see more of you I should have found my sand dunes blossoming like a garden.”

“ This is the first time this evening that you have evinced the slightest desire to see me.”

“ What mendacity ! ” he murmured.

“ I am glad that you commanded me to

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

sit down," I admitted. "I like to be ordered to do things."

"I love to boss," he interrupted.

"People are beginning to go!" I exclaimed, rising.

"*Allons*," he said resignedly, and together we sought Ma Belle. We found her, and Mr. Morris expressed his thanks for a pleasant evening in a most felicitous manner.

Tom and I remained until all the guests had departed. I think that both of us wished to make sure that our dear one was not too tired after all her hospitable exertion. Tom said :

"Fair hostess, it was a great success. You are simply buried beneath a mountain of compliments; not even your head shows above the heap."

*A head above compliments* "You are mistaken, Tom, I always keep my head above compliments," she replied with a vivid smile.

"By Jove, you do that!" asserted Tom. Then I kissed her and told her it was the most interesting reception I had ever attended.

## MENTAL REFRESHMENTS

"Then I know you were particularly interesting," answered she. "For a reception is like everything else in life—you get out of it only what you put into it."

*Wherein a  
reception  
resembles  
other  
activities*

"Are you very tired?" I asked solicitously.

"I feel like this poor rose," she answered, taking the flower from her corsage, "my petals are not only limp but shriveled."

"Your simile is good, Mrs. Lee, the rose is sweeter than when it was fresh," said Tom gravely, taking the rose from her hand. Ma Belle was silent, and I wondered if her eyes were just a little moist when she bade us good night. Tom and I were both silent for a time after we got into the carriage; finally he said:

"You are tired, are n't you little girl?"

"Tired to death of myself, Tom."

"Now what has she been doing to make herself tired of her blessed self?" mused Tom.

"I shall never, never tell!" I asserted with energy.

"Then I shall have to find out all by my *A disturbing proposition* lonely."

## CONFESSEONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"Oh, don't!" I cried in a panic. "I do not want you to be tired of me, too."

"You need not fear that, ever, Marian," he *A comforting* said gravely as he helped me out of the car-  
*good night* riage, and there was sympathy and almost tenderness in his tones as he bade me good night. And so, taking all things into consideration, it is no wonder that I cannot sleep, and that I am keeping Your Matchless Ugliness awake while the sma' hours have grown greater.

## CHAPTER XVII

### DOMESTIC CATASTROPHES, AND THEIR TREATMENT

JANUARY 20TH :— Wise one, I suppose in the land of castes, whence you came, the serving people are in such a state of hereditary subjugation that the ways of households go on steadily with no upsets. Far different is it in this land where the mistress is mistress by necessity and the servant is servant by choice. It has always been a source of pride to me that my household folk are happy and devoted to the family interests. But this does not save me from an occasional day of extreme annoyance when everything goes wrong. There is hoodoo in the very atmosphere and friction between every two contiguous parts of the household machinery, and the creaking thereof is nerve-lacerating.

*Mistress from  
necessity  
servant from  
choice*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

The only really strong point in my character, I daresay, is that I have learned to keep serene when everything around me is seething and bubbling. That is what I did to-day when everything about the house went wrong, but I did not know that anyone in the family realized it. Therefore I was amused and a little gratified by a conversation which took place to-night when Ma Belle and Tom joined us around the study fire.

"What has happened to you to-day?" asked Ma Belle.

"We have been suffering a domestic cataclysm," I answered with feeling, and Tom exclaimed,

"What do I hear? I had the impression  
*A rift in the lute* that your domestic affairs always ran smoothly.

*lute* Your housekeeping is famed for its perfection, and now I am informed that there is a rift in the lute. I am deeply pained. Please explain what you mean by cataclysms."

"Well, this morning the coffee was muddy  
*A household hoodoo* and refused to pour through the spout but came out of the top and burned my hand. The chops were burned and the rolls heavy

## DOMESTIC CATACLYSMS

and even the amiable pater remonstrated. Mary was sulky and my sunny Maggie turned vixenish. When the exquisite Mrs. Delavan called, I discovered too late that there was dust on the piano deep enough to preserve cuneiform inscriptions; the fire-place was a desert of discouraged looking cinders and ashes, and the flowers in the vases were too far gone for anything save mementoes."

"Yes," interrupted Joe, "and at luncheon the salad had so little dressing, that it was *A scandalous salad* positively indecent for it to appear in polite society; and the custard was as curdled as was Mary's temper when, a little later, she smashed the meat platter to smithereens."

"Did the Irish temperament have anything to do with the slump?" asked Ma Belle.

"I think not," I answered with decision. "Such days come without regard to temperaments. We are altogether too prone to blame the Irish temperament for too many things that go wrong. After all is said, the Irish temperament is essentially the artistic temperament except that it is less self-centered. Those possessed of it are sympathetic, humor- *The Irish temperament*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

ous, making light of burdens; imaginative and therefore often not strictly truthful; not because they mean to be untruthful but *The truth too bare* because the bare truth seldom satisfies the dramatic demands of a situation. Moreover, they are likely to experience sudden changes in points of view; and there is a certain lack of sequence in their acts, a sort of an undistributed middle in their logic which is disconcerting to the prosaic Anglo-Saxon who is wont to call them unreliable, which is unjust."

"Bravo!" cried Tom, "I am glad my forebears were Irish."

"I wish you would tell us how you managed your cataclysm," said Ma Belle.

"I'll tell that story," said Joe. "She *Pleasing lubrication* started in by being entertaining to beat the band. She helped Mary dust, conversing with her vivaciously meanwhile, with marked and gratifying results. Then she went into the kitchen and was so 'fly' and diverting that she soon had Maggie in high feather. Marnie does not save up all her social ammunition for company, but uses it instead as Fourth of July fireworks in the household realm."

## DOMESTIC CATACLYSMS

“That’s true,” added father, “and she never finds fault at the moment a thing goes wrong, but waits until the annoyance of the failure has passed from the mind of the servant as well as her own. This is the way she manages to make her criticisms constructive instead of destructive.”

*Constructive criticism*

“Right you are, Professor,” pursued the irreverent Joe. “I’ll tell you how she does it : She takes the domestic cataclysm in her arms and pats it on the back until it changes to a kittyclysm ; and then she gently strokes the fur the right way until there is nothing left but the wide smile of the Cheshire cat.”

*The reduction of a domestic cataclysm*

We all laughed and the conversation drifted to more interesting channels. When Ma Belle and Tom were getting ready to depart, the latter said to me when no one else heard :

“Madam Marian, I wish I were a cataclysm,” and he looked at me, his face lighted with his most delightful smile.

“Why take such extreme measures?” I asked audaciously. His smile suddenly went out, and his face looked worn and tired as he *An audacious query* bade me good night.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THROUGH THE PINE WOODS WITH TOM

*February premonitions* **F**EBRUARY 20TH :—Since teak-wood neither freezes nor melts, I imagine that your Gracious Presence is not much interested in the weather ; however, since these confessions are mine and not yours, I take the liberty of stating that we have had a short respite from cold weather, and for a day or two we have dared to have February-ish thoughts of spring. And to-day Tom came after me for the long promised drive to the pine woods.

*An accomplished driver* We started at four o'clock. The air was almost balmy and the sleighing was perfect. Tom tucked me in carefully for he knows I am a luxurious body and that I love to have about me the warm, furry skins that once kept warm the howling wolf. The horses were in gay

## A DRIVE WITH TOM

spirits and gave Tom plenty of chances to show his superb skill as a driver ; there is between him and his horses a perfect understanding, and he never uses the whip except when teaching them to obey his voice. This once accomplished, his voice is the controlling power and his driving is a work of art.

"What a delightful sensation after such an awful day as I have had !" I exclaimed with a sigh of contentment.

"What has made her day so awful ?" Tom asked soothingly.

"A day spent with the oughts,—social oughts, business oughts, household oughts, and all this array of oughts added together has produced naught save weariness."

"I don't see it that way at all, little woman. I place you as the numeral at the left of all those naughts and it makes a big figure. Great Scott, Marian, you never did know how to count !"

"Thank you," I murmured meekly. "I hope you do not think that I was complaining. It is only that I sometimes feel that under the pressure of these outside oughts the inside

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

decencies get crowded into a small corner ; somehow it hurts one's self-respect."

"Better say vanity is hurt. Each and every woman nowadays is perfectly sure that she can do all the things there are to do in this big world ; and when she finds this an impossible achievement, her vanity is hurt, eh ? "

"Oh, well ! The difference between self-  
*Vanity or self- respect?* respect and vanity is merely one of degree, I suppose ; vanity craves the approval of the world at large and self-respect demands the approval of self as well ; it is a little more subjective, that is all."

"Oh, you bad little cynic !" exclaimed Tom, with a most dramatic gritting of the teeth.

"No, I am not a cynic ; but as the years go on I find new powers in myself for transmuting the gold of enthusiasm into the lead of commonplace—a sort of back-action alchemy that has never received as much attention from philosophers as it deserves."  
*The wrong kind of alchemy*

We were now climbing the hill. It had

## A DRIVE WITH TOM

been a soft, mild day, save for erratic, furtive snow squalls which threatened to turn to rain. As we gained the crest of a knoll, Tom stopped the horses while we looked at the scene below us. The hills on the far horizon were dimly veiled in storm clouds so that they seemed very distant; the nearer hills were in shadow; the forests scattered over them, outlined by snowy fields, were a vivid blue-purple—such a color as only an impressionist dares to paint; and yet it was so in harmony with the landscape and sky that it was beyond the reach of any impressionist. While I was reveling in this marvelous color, the sun rifted the clouds, and a field of sunshine sprang into being just beyond the purple. It was all so beautiful that the tears came into my eyes.

*An impressionist landscape*

“It is beautiful, is it not?” said Tom; as I did not answer, he looked at me and then added remorsefully: “I am a blunderer, Marian. How is it that you who revel in the subtle suggestiveness of elisions ever came to be friends with me, who, like an overgrown boy

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

in the reading class spell all my words out letter by letter, syllable by syllable, at the top of my voice!"

*A very good reason* "I suspect it is because I enjoy your voice," I answered with a contented laugh.

"Nice girl!" said Tom as he reached for the robes to fold them closer around me. We sped onward until we reached a high plateau, and there massed darkly against the northern horizon were the pine woods. The setting sun threw slant beams athwart its blackness touching the nearer trees into soft billows of light, and then disappearing left all in shadow. It was deep twilight in the woods as we entered; the almost oppressive silence was broken only by the sound of the horses' hoofs on the scant snow of the needle-carpeted road. On either side dimly visible were innumerable columns holding aloft the black canopy, which was broken in a tasseled fresco above our heads, against a sky beset with stars which had been invisible to us until then. Almost imperceptibly we became conscious of a faint, far, mysterious sound—a sibilant

## A DRIVE WITH TOM

breathing somewhere aloft which grew louder as it came nearer, until, like a great surf on a rocky shore, it seemed to break above our heads, and then recede, leaving us again in silence. Tom murmured, "I left the bells off the horses to-night that we might hear this." Again and again as we passed on, came that all-pervading, mysterious flood and ebb of sound. It was overwhelming to the spirit; I felt awed, as if I had unwittingly shared a service in some vast, secret temple of the gods. It was almost a relief when we emerged into the after-glow of the sunset and felt that we were again in our own world. For some time we were both silent and then Tom said softly :

" I knew you would like it."

" Why, Oh why did you never bring me here before ? " I asked aggrieved. Tom ignored the question and said :

" I often come here ; a drive through those woods seems to simplify life." His answer gave me a vague sensation of unrest, making me feel anew how little of his inner

*The song of  
the pines*

*The pine  
woods  
simplify life*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

life I was permitted to know. I said with a sigh :

"I cannot realize that anyone ever passed through those woods before, since the world began. I felt immersed in primeval solitude."

The moon, still a crescent, was hanging against the luminous green of the western horizon, as we descended the hill, following a stream in its downward course. The water, turbulent beneath its ice-bonds, was struggling for release. While we listened to its rebellious murmur, Tom said :

"Water is a comforting element, it is so *The comfort of obeying the law of nature unquestioningly* confoundingly simple in its action ; it flows down hill without ever questioning whether it might not be better to flow up hill instead."

"Yes, its philosophy puts in neither dams nor pumps," I answered sympathetically.

"I do not believe in a philosophy that thwarts nature's laws for unnatural ends, I'll be hanged if I do," said Tom grimly. Just then a meteor drew a luminous line on the sky, and I said musingly :

## A DRIVE WITH TOM

"The sky is careless of her stars to-night  
tossing them down to us through the ether."  
We were crossing a bridge, and Tom ex-  
claimed :

"Yes, look down there in that still pool and  
see two of them which have just dropped in ;  
there they are and, by Jove ! they are shining  
as brightly as if they were in the sky."

*Shining up  
as well as  
down*

"It is a fine achievement to be able to shine  
up as well as down, is n't it ?"

"I guess you know more than I do about  
that, little girl," said Tom. I cannot quite  
understand why I so enjoy having Tom call  
me "little girl," for I am not a girl, neither  
am I very little ; but when he calls me this I  
am conscious of a sudden and large increase  
in my psychic income.

When we finally reached the city street, I  
felt as if I had awakened from a dream. As  
Tom assisted me to alight I said,

"How can I ever thank you ?"

"You do not need to," he answered, and I  
knew it was true. And now while thinking  
it all over, I am wondering what I have' ever

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

done that I should gain from this world such  
*A glimpse of Walhalla* a beautiful experience as I have had this  
night. It must be true that the gods still  
care for us and give us once in a life-time a  
glimpse of Walhalla. That expresses it! I  
feel the same elation that I always experience  
when I listen to the Walhalla *motif*, suddenly  
enfolding in its exquisite harmonies the vast  
restlessness of the Wagner music.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A SKILFUL WOOING

MARCH 1ST :—My confessor, do you ever feel a nameless terror inspired by the wind? Just listen to it now howling around the sharp corners of our gables, shrieking and roaring the while it is trying to lift the scant snow from the hills and deposit it in the valley below! Look once at the great balsam firs in front of the window bend and stretch out their short arms helplessly to the blast, complaining meanwhile in deep sighs! The wind excites me and makes me afraid. If I were to worship any of the natural forces I should have to be a wind-worshipper.

*wind-worship*

I have not been making many confessions of late, have I? The reason is that I do not know what to confess; and there is so much of perplexity in my daily life that I do not wish to relive it again at night in confessions.

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

Rarely a day goes by without a call or some token from Theodore Morris. These tokens which he sends evince his skill as a wooer. One day it is a bunch of violets or a single rose ; the next, a book of poems or the latest novel ; the next day may bring some witticism clipped from a paper or perhaps a picture cut from a magazine. In some forgotten moment I must have expressed to him my love for trees, and the fascination which felines possess for me, for he is constantly sending me pictures of trees, from the pine to the lombardy poplar ; and pictures of cats from slinking leopards and snarling tigers to wee pussy-cats.

His plan seems to be that no day shall go by without bringing me something which shall turn my thoughts toward him.

As often as twice a week he and Hilda have *Music, the only bond* played for me delectable music ; music which, I am glad to say, was so superb that it rendered me quite oblivious to my devoted virtuoso. So far as I am able to discern, he and Hilda have only one bond holding them together and that is their music. Their conversation is mostly superficial, mere persiflage.

## A SKILFUL WOOING

On the other hand he never suffers from her asperities, and there is a fine gravity in his real attitude toward her, which their non-sensical conversation never quite hides. Hilda refuses to tell what she thinks of him ; when I ask her, she says that she has not thought about him, and looks bored.

The fact which confronts me is that his love-making of late has been of the most insidious and fascinating kind. I cannot reason it out why I find it so fascinating to be made love to ; my common sense and all the wisdom there is in me say it is utter folly. Ah me ! Long ago I gave up the doctrine of free will ; we are marionettes carved by heredity, and we are obliged to dance when circumstances pull the strings. I have evidently inherited my attitude toward love-making from all of my feminine ancestors, back to the time of Eve, who varied the monotony of Eden by listening to the flatteries of the serpent.

*We are  
marionettes  
carved by  
heredity*

It is no more than fair to myself to state that Theodore Morris' power over me is not entirely due to his masterly love-making ; he

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*The subtle force of a personality*

makes me like him without any regard to what he does or is. His ascendancy over me was won by the most subtle force I ever encountered—a force I have not been able to analyze or explain. Probably one of its elements comes from the remarkable way he seems to understand me; he really knows me far better than does father or Joe. It is one of the amazing mysteries of this amazing world that those about us read only certain obvious chapters of our personality, and some stranger discovers the hidden page of which we, ourselves, are scarcely conscious! Evidently I am an open book to T. M. from preface to appendix; and it is insidiously flattering to be so deftly understood. Moreover, it is so novel to find a man who really cares to take the trouble to understand a woman that it is no wonder I am impressed by the phenomenon.

*The flattery of being understood*

*The active or passive voice of amo*

Common sense is chiefly valuable as a means of accurate nomenclature; and my common sense tells me that I am quite as much of an idiot as the maiden in her teens who mistakes the passive for the active voice

## A SKILFUL WOOING

in conjugating *amo*. I am perfectly aware I am taking great pains to go out of my way to make myself trouble ; I am consciously allowing myself to be deflected misery-ward.

It is shilly-shallying which saps the moral strength. The half-and-half attitude is a most dangerous one ; strength can be frittered away much more surely than it can be torn away. I realize all this but it does not seem to help much.

And all this is happening to me ; after all my experience, all my resolves, and all my wisdom which I have been wont to define so airily as " knowledge changed into activity." Really the death and burial of a person is no more terrifying than this death which comes to us periodically in matters of feeling while we live. We practically suffer reincarnation every decade. We grow on and on, like Jack's bean-stalk, until our cotyledons are so far below that we cannot discern their shrunken shapes. Woe is me ! I felicitated myself that after the fortieth mile stone was passed I should find an easy down-hill grade whereon I could safely coast while

*The dangers  
of indecision*

*Every decade  
we molt our  
feelings and  
interests*

*No easy grade  
on the road of  
experience*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

enjoying the scenery. But there seems to be no long stretch of experience's road where the slope is in the right direction !

MARCH 2ND :—A certain grimness in your smile to-night, My Confessor, leads me to *Spring prophecies* think that you might appreciate a specific confession as to the methods pursued by T. M. when wooing. He came this afternoon and insisted that I go with him for a walk ; he declared that the snow was melted from the north bank of the river and that it was a prime necessity that we go and examine it. As we followed the river path there was a suggestion of spring in the "phoebe" song of the chickadee, and the trill which a nuthatch had substituted for his usual nasal monosyllable. Notwithstanding the scene was all that he had promised, mi-lord was gloomy and silent ; he is always silent when he does not feel like speaking, but there was in his silence this afternoon something which suggested anew that his ways were devious ; and as usual this deviousness was a temptation to me. It is always a danger to me not to know just



**"But there seems to be no long stretch of experience's road where  
the slope is in the right direction!"**



## A SKILFUL WOOING

where I am in any particular experience; it goads me on to desperate deeds to relieve *Maddening uncertainty* the uncertainty. I imagine that woman's most reprehensible acts have often been the results of maddening uncertainty. This may account for what I said, since nothing else can.

"Why are you so silent and gloomy?" I asked in tones as tender as if they had been parboiled.

"T is the silence of happiness my lady," he responded while the line between his eyes deepened.

"Nonsense! You are not conscious of me at all; you are simply and obviously conscious of yourself and your own thoughts."

"How can I tell, since the consciousness of *A pretty speech* you is almost self-consciousness," he answered musingly.

"That is a pretty speech but not very convincing."

"I did not expect you to believe it; I offered it for your inspection as a single ray taken from the halo which you have thrown around my thoughts."

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

" You are hopelessly blind, did you know it? "

" Yea, verily," he answered, " I cannot see clearly because my eyes are dimmed with the glamour of happiness to come." Then his mood changed suddenly and he became an intensely conscious part of the world about us ; he whistled the chickadee song until we were followed by the beguiled titmouse. Once he placed his hand suddenly on mine to stay my steps while we listened to a woodpecker sounding his roll on the dead branch of a hickory just in front of us ; incidentally, he did not let go of my hand until I took it away. We climbed the bank, following the course of a brook beset with fascinating tracks of beasties along its snowy rim, and my companion turned hunter and resolved these trails into those made by squirrel, mouse and bunny. The day grew sombre suddenly ; as we attained a sightly point we beheld the clouds in gray billows hung low over hills forebodingly blue ; then for a moment the sun appeared again and sent adrift down the valley a few stray rays of sunlight which, in passing,

*The writing  
by the brook-  
side*

## A SKILFUL WOOING

touched the purple forests into golden, the snow to silver and the winding river to burnished bronze. We found a dry stump all flounced and furbelowed with fungi which he declared was a Druid throne and which I at once usurped.

"No queen was ever so satisfied with her kingdom as I with this," I averred, pointing to the valley under its changing hues.

"You have come into only a small part of your kingdom, dear queen ; the rest is waiting, are you *never* coming to claim it?" These words were uttered in a passionate whisper as he drew close to me, and for one brief moment I saw what seemed desperation in those unfathomable eyes. Confessor, no one but you shall ever know how near I came to saying at that moment just two words, "I come." The situation demanded it, and I longed to know what would really happen if I said them ; but some remnant of common sense restrained my dramatic curiosity and saved me.

"No use!" I sighed. "I could not find a competent chancellor of the exchequer ; besides, it would be such a task to decide what

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

style of crown would be most becoming to me."

"You are frivolous, my lady, horribly frivolous."

*The question  
of crown-  
jewels* "Do you not suppose that the boundaries of her kingdom are of less importance to any queen than the becomingness of her crown?" I demanded indignantly; then I asked with mock impressiveness, "What jewels would you really advise for my crown, dewdrops or snow crystals?"

"Opals, my lady, surely opals above all others."

"Why, pray?"

*The opal  
typifies love* "The opal epitomizes love—it is always the same, and yet never quite the same."

"For instance?"

"One moment it is pale and pure, the next it is green and restful, then blue and deep and then purple and rich. It flashes for a moment with the yellow rays of happiness the while it hides in its depths the red glow of human passion, and the topaz glitter of jealousy. It is changeful and abiding, perhaps abiding because changeful." He said this

## A SKILFUL WOOING

slowly and impersonally while looking at a magnificent opal set in the ring on his third finger. It was an interesting interpretation of the stone, but I thought a change in the tenor of the conversation desirable.

"On the whole, I think I prefer the red feathers which crown yonder woodpecker; they would surely be becoming and would not weigh down the royal head," I exclaimed gayly, as I abdicated my throne and turned my steps homeward. Again he became silent and moody, striding along at my side as if he were going to war instead of rambling for pleasure. I began to chatter :

"A walk like this makes for freedom from carking care. I have quite forgotten how desperately busy I was this morning, and how my moments marched lockstep, each jostling the one ahead in a most trying and rude manner. I should like my moments to be polite and courteous to each other ; I should rather have them dance grave minuets than mad jigs."

"As the moment is bent, the day is inclined," he muttered.

"Yes, I sometimes believe that with all my

*The crowded  
moments  
march  
lock-step*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

hurry and worry I shall be reduced to a mere wraith, transparent and impalpable."

"Never fear, my lady, you will remain *The security of opacity* opaque for some time yet," he interrupted with evident irritation.

"Thanks," I murmured fervently.

When we arrived home I invited him to stay to dinner and he accepted without enthusiasm. Later Hilda came and the evening was made rapturous with their music. Except when playing, Mr. Morris was obviously gloomy during the entire evening; and Hilda was quiet and wholly uninteresting.

I cannot say that I am really any farther *Kismet* along the fatal path I am treading than I was this morning, and yet I *feel* that I am. A new comprehension of the word "kismet" is coming to me. I suppose a trout hooked securely to a long line made fast to a beautiful, flexible bamboo rod says to itself "This is nothing, I shall soon get away!" and thereupon makes sundry wild rushes this way and that and later, when it is lifted flopping into the net, it might, if it could speak, give a brand-new definition to that queer word kismet.

## A SKILFUL WOOING

MARCH 15TH:—Nearly two weeks since I confessed, is n't it? Well, though it has been a tempestuous March, my path has been strewn with the blossoms of narcissus and I am drunk with their fragrance.

It seems to me that of late there is a veil hung between Hilda and myself. We see *Gambling with destiny* each other often, and we talk as usual, and yet there is always present somewhat of constraint. It may be that my attitude toward my own affairs is responsible for it. I would gladly turn to Hilda for advice in solving my most perplexing problem, only at bottom I know that I desire neither help nor advice. I am playing fan-tan with destiny and I will play it alone. Besides, I could not endure Hilda's scathing criticism of my folly. I believe if she and T. M. were better friends I should feel more like confiding the question to her; but they seem strangers to each other except when playing together. One might think that music would limber their reciprocal indifference, but music land is far from this world and has little to do with it.

## CHAPTER XX

### A NICE AFTERNOON. LOVE'S INITIATION FEE

MARCH 16TH:—Such a delightful afternoon! Hilda and I were sewing comfortably before the fire when Ma Belle came in. She has been having a most trying experience with a sister-in-law who is always in trouble and always asking for advice which she never by any chance follows. To-day Ma Belle evidently came to me for comfort, for she was obviously downcast when she came in.

“What new misfortune has come to Aunt Emma,” I asked.

“She never has *new* misfortunes,” averred *Inherent* Ma Belle, “her misfortunes are inherent and *misfortunes* were born with her, being a part and parcel

## A NICE AFTERNOON

of her permanent condition. She is like a sore thumb ; every time anything in her vicinity moves she gets a whack."

"She always seems meekness personified," said Hilda."

"That is one of her vices," declared *ma mère*. "I get irritable in the presence of that self-effacing attitude. The more she effaces herself, the more aggressive she really is. Instead of bearing her cross she uses it as a weapon of offence, batting every one with it who is unlucky enough to be in her proximity. Her warped judgment and twisted ideals are the result of her belief in her own meekness. Whatever she does she *knows* is right. Great heavens ! It almost comforts me for never doing what I know is right."

*Her cross, a weapon of offence*

"I never thought Aunt Emma sufficiently decisive to be even self-complacent," said I with a smile.

"Oh, she is n't decisive," groaned Ma Belle, "she is always flopping around in the *etcetera* of events."

"As for that," I argued with a guilty conscience, "it is astonishing how little of

*The fatal eddies in the wake of action*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

good or ill any of us do under the stress of decisive action, and how much of both we do when drifting around in the currents set up by such action."

"I see plainly that Aunt Emma is likely to be the origin of a philosophy," laughed Hilda.

"Let's not argue; I came here to be soothed and to receive sympathy and support," said Ma Belle with a long and deep sigh.

"Please hem this napkin for me," said I,  
*Plain sewing  
and smoking* "there is nothing so soothing to lacerated feminine nerves as nice plain sewing; it is like smoking for calming masculine nervousness." Ma Belle smiled and seated herself comfortably to her task.

"We have reason to be thankful that when the recording angel scores he does not have to bother with the whys and wherefores; this is no more than fair since our virtuous deeds are quite as often the results of accident as are our sins," said I after we had been sewing in silence for some time.

*Virtues  
accidental,  
sins  
incidental* "Listen to my aphorism: My sins are incidental to my virtues, and my virtues are mostly accidental to my sins!" declared Hilda grandly.

## A NICE AFTERNOON

“That sounds impressive,” said Ma Belle,  
“but I never shall be reconciled to the waste-  
ful plan of this universe. We all live and  
store up experience for nothing apparently

*The glut of  
ready-made  
experience*

since those we would guide will have none of  
it, and we mostly attain it too late to make  
it of much use to ourselves. Why must each  
one experience all things for himself as if  
there were not a world full of ready-made  
experience waiting for him?”

“It is necessary in order to develop indi-  
viduality,” I ventured tritely.

“Oh, I am tired of this modern plea for the  
individual,” Ma Belle exclaimed vindictively.  
“When stripped of sophistry it means that  
the individual has the right to follow every  
selfish desire and investigate every temptation  
to get out of it all there is in it for him. That  
is what most people mean when they declare  
they are following the ideals of Goethe and  
Browning (and for which they ought to be  
sued for libel). Such people seem to think  
that the individual ought to be developed in  
every way except along the line of responsi-  
bility to others. An individuality does not

*The  
sophistry  
of self-indul-  
gence*

*The  
individual  
needs prun-  
ing rather  
than develop-  
ing*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

need developing, it needs trimming down so that it will fit other individuals instead of impaling them."

"Happy thought!" cried Hilda, "each of us trimmed down to a hexagon so we fit like the cells of a honeycomb. But, Mrs. Lee, where would the fun come in?"

*A new definition of "fun"* "Freedom from moral and physical restraint is not what you are pleased to call 'fun,'" argued *ma mère*. "It is only by being in bondage to all sorts of restraints that we may even recognize 'fun' when we meet it. License is not 'fun,' but dodging our inevitable responsibilities is glorious 'fun'; that's why I am enjoying you two sirens here when I ought to be visiting with Emma."

"Fun is the nap we steal after the rising bell rings," said Hilda appreciatively. Ma Belle continued :

*The rapture of the broken link* "Being good is not 'fun'; neither is being bad 'fun'; but trying to be good and being bad without trying solves the fun problem for ever and ever. Freedom is tiresome and commonplace; 't is the broken link in the chain of bondage which is rapture."

## A NICE AFTERNOON

"Ma Belle, I am convinced you have done some great and good thing for Aunt Emma. It is always a sign you have been busy with good works when you make cynical remarks," I declared with emphasis.

"I have to get even some way," she answered with a smile that to me is the most beautiful smile in the world. "Truth compels me to state that I did have an interview with Emma this morning wherein I gently but firmly called her attention to some large facts. She is so concerned with the pebbles in her path that she gives no attention to the boulders until they block her way and then she sulks and feels abused. I have been dreading this interview for a week."

"I have often meditated upon the fit moment psychologically for doing a disagreeable thing," remarked Hilda musingly. "If it is done at once it costs a terrible wrench to the feelings and great moral effort, and when done scarcely affords the relief it might if it had been dreaded for a longer period. On the other hand, if it is not done until the last possible moment one gets so in the habit

*The fit  
moment for  
a dreaded  
task*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

of dreading it that the feeling persists long after. There must be a right time somewhere between the two extremes."

"It requires rare judgment to elect the moment; there are no compensations at any time. 'Must' is master and no reward offered," rejoined Ma Belle crisply.

"If I were to start life anew, I should never do a disagreeable thing, nor experience a disagreeable sensation if I could help it," I declared with positiveness.

"A flabbiness would result which would make your present weak amiability seem like cast iron," said Hilda.

*The placid space lying between "have to" and "want to"* "Try it once: just scrupulously avoid all the 'have to's' and likewise the 'want to's' and sail along placidly in the easy current which winds between these outer and inner mandates. This would be far better than the periodical re-ossification of the vertebral column which you practice so strenuously," said I.

"Marian, you are mistaken; Hilda never needs such refurbishing," suggested Ma Belle, with a smile.

"Little do you know about it, Mrs. Lee; I

## A NICE AFTERNOON

need it this minute. You would both be horrified if you knew how weak and wobbly I really am," answered Hilda, soberly.

Just then the daily token from Mr. Morris appeared in the guise of a bunch of violets. *Malapropos violets* Though I experienced the most painful embarrassment, I was on guard and quite unconcernedly placed them in a vase on the table, saying as I did so :

"That confession of yours, Hilda, affords me supreme comfort." Ma Belle picked up the card that came with the violets and remarked :

"It seems to me, Marian, that this young man is a most devoted admirer of yours." I looked straight into her eyes and think she understood me a little when I said, "He is here at the house so much with Joe that I suppose he thinks it good form to be especially polite to his hostess." She answered with a laugh :

"I was trying to tease you, Marian ; your accessibility has always been a source of *Squatter sovereignty* amusement to me. You are like government land : all that anyone has to do who desires

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

you for a friend is to come along and stake out his claim."

"That is true," I admitted with some asperity, "and I occasionally experience a squatter."

*Hilda to the rescue* "I think Mr. Morris would feel greatly complimented if he could hear this conversation," said Hilda, with pronounced sarcasm.

"It is my private opinion, Hilda," I answered dryly, "that he would not care a rap about this conversation or any other of which he was the chief topic. In all my life I have never before met a youth who is so little affected by things outside of himself as is this same Theodore Morris. He pursues his own path, fixedly and undeviating in a way that is appalling to witness."

"It seems to me from the little I know of him that he is quite justified in so doing," declared Hilda, belligerently. I was surprised, and I think Ma Belle was also a little startled; but I cannot hide from myself that I was gratified as well as surprised. In thinking the matter over I am at loss to know to what to attribute this defense of Hilda's; but sooner

## LOVE'S INITIATION FEE

or later I shall discover the reason for it.

People tell me that my instincts and intuitions are marvelously correct, and I never dispute them. But, Own Idol, I can tell you that I have n't in my possession an instinct or an intuition worthy the name. I am simply quick to observe, and I bring what I observe before the eyes of judgment, and finally reach conclusions which are correct, unless they concern myself. I have no judgment whatever in assorting and defining the facts I discover about myself. I have always sailed under sealed orders ; and to-night it seems to me that these orders were taken from the grab-bag of the Parcæ sisters.

MARCH 17TH :—Do you know that we really never get to understand people unless we have a chance to see how they act under the strain and stress of a love affair ? And even then we understand but little. I have ever been a close student of Joe all his life, and I understand him and his motives and his emotions absolutely ; and yet now that he is in love he seems like a stranger to me. On his affec-

*Intuition or  
judgment*

*Love, the  
prestidigita-  
tor*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

tionate side he has always been sweet, gentle and leadable; now that he loves a woman I find him harsh and almost cruel in his attitude toward her.

*Joe in the  
toils* Last evening after he came home from the opera whither he escorted Dolly Pease, he confessed to me his love for Millie Van Tyne. I was somewhat surprised, for if Joe and Millie love each other the fact has not been apparent to the eye of the public. It is true that they quarrel almost constantly, but quarreling is by no means synonymous with loving. Joe has thought he was in love at least twice before, but in each case it was a gentle and sentimental relationship, with none of the pepper and spice in it which seems to have characterized this affair with Millie. So when he told me his feelings I expressed my surprise by saying :

“ If you are in love with Millie, what in the world are you taking Dolly to the opera for ? ”

“ It is a good thing for a girl who thinks she is the only pebble on your beach to learn that there may be yet other pebbles,” he answered with a superior air.

## LOVE'S INITIATION FEE

"True," agreed I, "that is the proper treatment for girls; it keeps them from tossing their heads in premature pride and spilling their milk like the milk-maid of whom our ancestors were wont to read in their spelling books."

*The proper  
treatment for  
fair maids*

"I do not know much about milk-maids but I know a few things about fair maids; in fact, one or two of them have taught me lessons which I trust I do not need to learn twice," he answered morosely.

"Well, my dear," said I, "I am glad to see that you have not lost your head even if you have lost your heart. But I must confess I shall have more faith in your love for Millie when you become a little more humble in spirit."

"I shall never be humble with her! Why, Marnie, when she teases me and quarrels with me as she so constantly does I feel like putting both arms around her and crushing the life out of her to punish her and make her keep still."

*The method of  
love's  
punishment*

"I am not sure but your instinct is right," I admitted, "she is a girl who needs heroic treatment."

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"She is going to get it," he replied curtly, and his beautiful finely chiselled lips set in a hard straight line which, at once, made me Millie's stanch ally. I hope she will lead him a breathless chase and bring him to his knees in the end. I know what is good for him even if he is my own boy.

MARCH 18TH:—By the way, Uncurious *Pardonable curiosity* One, I wonder if you know that ever since T. Morris told me so calmly that he had had many love affairs, I have always wished to know the particulars. Not that I care about the persons concerned, or the stories thereof, but I am dying of curiosity to know just what he would say about these experiences. I am not so naïve as to ask him to talk about them, but several times I have made it perfectly easy for him to do so, by alluding rather teasingly to his frittered affections. But the effectual way he puts up the sign, "No trespass," is only equalled by the way he *No trespassing* avoids trespassing on my own preserves. Maybe he believes that at my age there is no grass left because of the many foot pat-

### **LOVE'S INITIATION FEE**

through it ; it would be just like his callow superciliousness to think so. This may all be enigmatical to you, Mr. Idol, but it is quite luminous with meaning to me.

## CHAPTER XXI

### SACK-CLOTH AND ASHES

MARCH 24TH :—If I did not have you, I would naturally confess to the flames *Flame* which lap up the offerings of wood which I *fascination* place nightly upon my hearth. I wonder if it is the darting fire-tongues which hold me spellbound while life and its perplexities ebb away, leaving nothing thinkable or dreamable in their place, or is it something more subtle ? Time thus spent is not measured by moments nor hours nor even by eternity. It comes nearer Nirvana than anything else vouch-safed to us mortals of the Occident.

I have spent such an evening alone before *Upsetting the temper-box* my fire and have just watched the embers turn from glow to gray. It has been the only happy part of my day. I have been ill and not very patient, any little annoyance upsetting my temper-box and giving my en-

## SACK-CLOTH AND ASHES

vironment a hot sprinkle. Duties undone—the letters I ought to have written, the work I ought to have accomplished, the word I ought to have said, the deeds I ought to have performed, all of these have hung over me to-day like a black cloud, shutting out all vision of blue sky. Yet my sins of omission are no greater to-day than they were last week when I was serene and cheerful. There is a weird connection between conscience and disordered nerves that makes the outlook for the origin of conscience rather dubious.

*The neurotic  
origin of  
conscience*

I realize I have been mighty inhospitable in spirit of late toward the world at large; I have ceased to be an organ with the *vox humana* stop in working order; although it is true that I have treated most people around me with a decency becoming to that arch-hypocrite, the altruist. So I have been indulging in sack-cloth and ashes as is fitting for a sinner in Lent; and I feel that I shall adopt a permanent costume of sack-cloth and a permanent diet of ashes. Please do not interrupt me by stating that ashes are not

*Ashes mis-  
applied*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

for eating ; it matters not whether they are for outer or inner application. I know the taste of ashes perfectly, and I also know where the sack-cloth abrades the flesh.

*Inconsistent longings* Ma Belle is out of town, and Hilda has given me but brief moments of light during the long four days of my illness. The house, except this my own room, is overflowing with the flowers which Theodore Morris has sent. I would have none of them in sight ; I felt too cross to look at them. I have longed for some sign of sympathy from another source and have been cast down and miserable because I did not get it. It is strange how our longings of the moment distort our perspective. I ought to be glad that this sign has been denied me, considering the port to which I am drifting.

MARCH 25TH :—I have felt very much better to-day and took luncheon with the family. But when Mr. Morris called, I sent word that I was not able to see him ; the bouquet of sweet peas in front of your tiny feet was his response.

## SACK-CLOTH AND ASHES

Late in the afternoon Tom called. I meditated on the question as to whether I ought to go down at all ; and if I did conclude to go whether I should wear the black robe I had on or don a new lavender tea-gown of a most beguiling pattern. Then I called myself an idiot, and snatching a few pink pea blossoms for the throat of my gown, I hurried down stairs. Tom came forward to meet me and said quite anxiously :

"I did not know you had been ill until an hour ago."

"I have been ill for months," I asserted reproachfully. "I have been so ill that I even went so far as to plan my own funeral, and that is far worse than dying. I can think of confronting my recording angel with equanimity, and of my possible or even probable future state with composure; but when I contemplate my own funeral, my heart quails. And this time one of the poignant discomforts of the situation was that you would probably learn of the obsequies first through the daily paper."

"The moral of which is?"

*A difference  
in the treat-  
ment of  
callers*

*Obsequies  
worse than  
death*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"That you stay away from your friends too much."

*Ends treatment for the Father of His country*  
"I have been so confoundedly busy of late that I stand George Washington on his head every time I put a stamp on an envelope, I am in such a hurry, a summary treatment which makes him obviously red in the face," answered Tom with an apologetic laugh; then he continued, soberly, "By Jove! it is awful the way this inevitable old world works itself in between friends with its wedges of work and care, driving them in by the impact of busy hours."

"Yes, and there is a certain expedient indifference that comes between friends which is unnatural and horrible like some monster with gnarled, twisted limbs and leer-eyed."

"So long as it is not green-eyed we need not fear," answered he with a laugh.

*The green-eyed compared with other monsters*  
"You are mistaken, sir, the green-eyed monster is far less to be feared, for it is never born of indifference."

"You make me feel complimented by implying that you have missed me."

"Why should n't I miss you?" I asked with

## SACK-CLOTH AND ASHES

asperity. "Ma Belle is away, Hilda is busy, and Joe and father are here only at meals, and you have shown no sign that you were aware of my existence. I have felt abused and lonesome."

"I met a beautiful young man turning his steps hither this afternoon," he said teasingly.

"Then you have seen more than I have," I returned boldly, "for no beautiful young man has crossed my range of vision."

"His flowers had better luck than he, then," quoth Tom, significantly glancing at my sweet peas.

"Because I hastily adorned myself with the nearest thing at hand so I should not look so much like a disturbed ghost when I came down to see you, please do not make me feel foolish," said I, slipping out of the corner into which he had pushed me.

"Cruel woman, to wear one man's flowers to make yourself beautiful in another man's eyes!"

"True, the ways of a woman with flowers be strange! Oh, please stop teasing, and let's talk about things that are worth while."

*The way of a  
woman with  
flowers*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"I saw a 'glue bird and a wobbin'  
to-day," he quoted.

"Tell me where and what they were  
doing."

*Things worth while*  
"The blue bird was singing a querly note  
from the apple tree and the robin was dancing  
a glide on the lawn. And it is time you were  
well and went walking with me to the woods  
on South Hill to find if any hepaticas have  
dared yet to lift their heads."

And then we had a real and happy visit,  
and I was greatly cheered by it, and am not a  
bit ashamed to own it.

*A fugue instead of a symphony*  
APRIL 7TH :—It is two weeks since I told you  
things, is n't it? The fact is, I am so per-  
plexed that I had rather forget than confess.  
My self-song has become a theme for a fugue  
when I long to have it made into a symphony ;  
it simply repeats over and over with infinite  
variations the same tedious questions.

Too much of my time is given to T. M.  
He comes and I do not know how to send him  
away—or else I do not wish to. He often  
makes violent love to me, but almost as often

## SACK-CLOTH AND ASHES

sits wrapped in gloom like an invisible cloak. Occasionally I have sane moments and see *wings or* things as they are. Methinks Titania now *ears* and then must have gotten a distinct view of Bottom's ears ; and in her heart of hearts must have acknowledged that they were *bona fide* ears ; and even thinking of how long and silky they were did not entirely reassure her. Alas, that I, too, should be studying ears and trying to make them seem like wings !

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE SPRINGTIME MADNESS

**A**PRIL 10TH :—Do you realize that spring has come? Do your innermost teak particles vibrate to the sounds of revivified being? There is a peculiar unction to the uproll of your eyes which leads me to infer that you, like the rest of us, are ready to stop existing and begin living. Tom came this afternoon to take me for the promised tramp for hepaticas. As he came in, he found father and myself on the porch in a sunny corner and he greeted us with:

“It is so obviously and enthusiastically spring time to-day that I have had to exert self-control to keep from drinking the bottle of green ink on my desk. Even the trolley is singing a spring song, just listen to it!”

“I never suspected a trolley car of sentiment before,” said father.

## THE SPRINGTIME MADNESS

"Which goes to prove that we are likely to misunderstand our nearest neighbors and most familiar associates," I suggested.

"I, too, have succumbed to the day," admitted father shame-facedly. "I went this morning and purchased some implements which look like agricultural tools afflicted with paresis, and as soon as I can recover from the self-consciousness induced by the purchase I shall hie me hence and learn to play golf."

"It is the spring madness! There is no foretelling what form it may take!" rejoined Tom comfortingly. Then, turning to me, "Madam Marian, there are some pinky posies on the south exposure of South Hill, come and help me pick them."

We left father to the rueful contemplation of his new enterprise and were soon beyond the bounds of our little city. As we climbed the fence which separates the pasture from the woodland, Tom said :

"Jove! Listen to that robin once. Are n't his remarks pat?"

"What does he say?"

*More spring  
madness*

*A robin  
remarks*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"Are you deaf, Marian? Does he not say plainly, 'Here you are, here you are, sweet, sweet, sweet.' I don't wonder the little beggar blushes."

"That is a polite translation of yours," I answered gayly, "and it is true, too, for here we are and it is surely sweet," and I stooped to pluck the downy stem of a hepatica blossom.

"Why don't the sculptors use hepatica leaves for their cornices and capitals?" asked Tom, picking one of the purple-brown leaves.

"I never touch the soft stem of this posy without thinking of baby fingers," I answered irrelevantly.

"And you have never ceased to mourn her loss during all these years?" Tom stood on a knoll looking down at me wistfully as he asked this question; meanwhile the robin sang "sweet, sweet, sweet."

"I have always missed her—and have always loved her," I answered steadily.

"You have always been a spendthrift of love. Have you no fears of being beggared?" Then without waiting for a reply he went on: "God! what hostages we have to give if we

## THE SPRINGTIME MADNESS

truly live. I often wonder how we dare to love at all."

"Loving is not based upon daring," I remonstrated.

"Sometimes it is," he muttered.

"Love is worth all it costs," I said firmly.

"You are brave to say so. We set our little lights upon the hill, but how little we shine compared with what we suffer."

"And yet there are those who believe that suffering may be conserved in shining! But we came out to be happy and care free, and here we are roiling up the deeps. Queer, is n't it, how conquered emotions have recrudescence on the most *mal à propos* occasions!"

*The radiant  
energy of  
suffering*

"Good Heaven, yes! And when one goes on year after year with eyes always blinded by the smoke of battle, it is rather appalling to contemplate the number and variety of subdued emotions which are likely to haunt one's path. The other night after hearing that tragedy so superbly played, I thought how terrible and tragic on the stage are sin and death and the aching heart, and how trivial and commonplace they are in real life."

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Real life not  
properly  
staged* “It is because on the stage we see them in true perspective ; but while living them we push our way through blindly, feeling all, but seeing and understanding only a little of the deeper relation of our experience to the moral world. We are at too close range for true perspective. Ah, here is a crimson cup !” I exclaimed, as I lifted from its bed of leaves a decayed branch which bore a delicate flesh-colored crimson-lined *peziza* cup. “I never *a fairy  
beaker* could be made to believe that this is a fungus ; I still hold my childish belief that it is a fairy beaker. I promise you if you will drink from this you will experience enchantment.”

“I am too old for enchantment,” he demurred.

“You are not too old !” I asserted indignantly.

“I am getting to be reverend in spots,” he maintained.

“They are so few and far between they do not affect the *ensemble*,” I declared, and thus our talk drifted to trivialities as we turned our steps homeward with our treasures from woodland.



"Confessor, I wish I knew whether it is something or nothing that  
I sometimes see in Tom's eyes"

• 4.

## THE SPRINGTIME MADNESS

Confessor, I wish I knew whether it is something or nothing that I sometimes see in Tom's eyes. If it is something, it is tantalizingly elusive ; if it is nothing, I have wasted too much time trying to make something of it. Life would indeed be dull without enigmas, and this one is likely to remain a perennial source of interest.

*Something or  
nothing*

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE IMPATIENCE OF MR. MORRIS LEADS TO A CHANGE IN CONFESSORS

**M**AY 25TH :—I have been sitting in the window-seat for an hour, listening to the flood of waters in the ravine. The murmur of flowing water affects me differently at different times. Sometimes I could worship water because it flows on forever, and sometimes I hate it because it flows on forever.

*Some things  
unlike water  
cannot go on  
forever*

One thing is borne in upon me at the present moment, and that is I cannot go on forever with Theodore Morris as I have been going on of late. I must decide soon; and I am much farther from a decision than I was on that highly entertaining evening after the opera, when he declared his unsuspected and undesired love. The fact that I am so much farther away from a decision is

## A CHANGE IN CONFESSORS

what alarms me. It shows how far I have been swept beyond the right landing by the current of his will and desire.

He seems to have changed greatly during the past two months. From being calm and superior, he has become moody, taciturn and gloomy. If this is the result of loving me, he will probably be reduced to melancholia if I marry him—which is a flippant remark about a most serious matter, Most Solemn Image.

*A melancholy influence*

To-night I experienced a highly dramatic moment that makes me shiver when I think of it. There were several people here for the evening and we had had much music. T. M. lingered after the others had gone and followed me to the door, where I had given Hilda into the quite obviously devoted care of Phil. Schlegel, who is with her much of late. We stood on the porch and watched the two disappear down the walk, Phil's tall form bending gallantly above Hilda as if she had warped him in her direction. There were chairs on the porch and the night was warm, so I proposed that we sit for a little while. He neither accepted my invitation

*A civilized method of clubbing*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

nor allowed me to seat myself; instead, he took my hands in his usual masterly way, and for the first time addressed me by my given name, which intimidated me more than I would be willing to have him know. It was a civilized and polite way of clubbing me into silence and obedience.

"Marian, are you never going to give me my answer?" he asked hoarsely.

"I do not think you have ever asked me for an answer," I replied, parrying.

"Every day I have asked it," he continued ~~a dramatic~~ impetuously. "A thousand times I have <sup>moment</sup> asked it; I have watched and waited for it through the interminable days of long months. Cannot you see that I am miserable and wretched and am wearing out under the stress of waiting! I think you do not understand how much I need your love just now. It would prove my salvation and strength in ways of which you do not dream; Marian, do not keep me waiting longer!"

As he grew more vehement and his agitation became more apparent, I waxed cool and self-possessed. My hands were still in

## A CHANGE IN CONFESSORS

his grasp, but they were passive and unresponsive while I answered him :

“I have not given you my decision, Theodore, because I have not known my own mind. Be patient with me for a little while yet! I am sorry that you must suffer and wait, but I am trying to be true to myself and to you. I promise you an answer very soon.” My voice was calm and soothing but his trembled as he answered :

“Heaven help you to decide aright! I will never again be so weak and childishly impatient.” Then he bade me good-night and went his way, leaving me to think again how different he is from what he formerly was. Two months ago I could have predicted that his answer would have been : “There is but one way to decide—you are mine and you do love me.” Instead of which he says, “Heaven help you to decide aright.”

*Help from  
above  
much needed*

I suppose you must have noticed, Wise Confessor, that from first to last this man has been beyond my comprehension. Life with him would have too little of the comfort of monotony, I fear. And I think you will

*Not enough of  
comfortable  
monotony*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

agree that an aged lady of my habits had best not embark on a voyage that is likely to be tempestuous, with nothing to steer by except a demagnetized compass which has evidently lost its hold on the pole star entirely.

I have just come to a conclusion, which I am sure is a good one. I will go to Ma Belle with the whole matter ; perhaps she, in her wisdom, can set me straight. What though

*A confessor with a heart instead of a grin*  
I was the wife of her only son ! She will meet the question without prejudice. Ma Belle has the tender heart of a woman, but she regards things impersonally, like a wise man ; she will consider my problem as abstractly as if she had never seen me before, and as vitally as if I were her own daughter. You have been very good to confess to, Idol, but that unimpaired grin of yours has irritated me a little of late. I shall probably come back to you again as soon as you will wish to see me, for I think you are getting a little tired of me, as well.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### MA BELLE'S STORY

MAY 30TH :—Dear Confessor, I think if I did not have you to turn to to-night I should be lost. I will try to give you that conversation with Ma Belle which occurred yesterday, word for word ; and perhaps thus I may come to a different conclusion from that forced upon me at the time.

I found her radiant in a white gown with a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley on her bosom. She prolongs the season of these, her favorite flowers ; and always wears them from the first daring bloom of April to the last lingering blossom of June. I did not wait for formalities, but said to her at once :

“ Ma Belle, I am in trouble and I need you. When can you talk to me ? ”

“ Come with me to my room,” she answered, giving me a keen glance that was

*Ma Belle's  
beloved  
flowers*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

like an X-ray turned upon my inner turmoil. Ma Belle's room is like herself, restful. The prevailing color in it is heavenly blue, yet there is no one thing which displays this color obtrusively ; it is like being enfolded in a bit of sky to enter the room. She placed me in an easy chair, bolted the door and seated herself at my side. She knew instinctively that looking me in the face would disconcert me.

"I do not know where to begin," I faltered.

"Begin in the middle," she suggested *A good place* practically, and I felt helped ; but my voice *to begin* was hoarse with terror when I finally said :

"My trouble is an absurd one ; the simple fact is Theodore Morris has been foolish enough to fall in love with me and rash enough to insist that I shall marry him."

"All of which goes to show that Mr. Morris is a young man of excellent taste, to fall in love with and wish to marry the most entrancing little woman in the whole world," she answered affectionately and as reassuringly as if it were a merely commonplace in-

## MA BELLE'S STORY

stead of a monstrous fact that I was telling to her. After a moment of silence she went on, "Marian, I have been surprised that you have not married again, and I hope you have understood me well enough to believe that I should always be happy in your happiness. You were a good wife to Paul; but this world is a place for living loves rather than for those that are dead. While we stay here it is right that we live strongly and completely, and if I could have my choice I would prefer to see you happily married. But tell me, what does the heart of my little girl say to the demands of this young man?" She so rarely calls me her "little girl" that I felt at once the support of her tenderness, and I turned and faced her as I answered:

"Honestly, I do not know. He is a powerful man and a masterly, interesting lover; and I have been more or less carried away from my moorings by him. But Ma Belle, what do you think of a woman marrying a man twelve years her junior? It seems to me preposterous and unthinkable. Did you ever hear of anything so foolish?" She smiled brightly, as she answered:

*This world a  
place for  
living loves*

*The age  
question  
again*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*The modern Lorelei* Marian, I have discovered that the modern Lorelei may have silver hair and a silver comb with which she seems to be able to lure innocent young sailors to an untimely landing. It takes a weird philosophy to account for the vagaries of the human heart; therefore I cannot explain why in these degenerate days, certain young men seem to find most attractive the women who have lived and known. The girl of sixteen which so dominated the novels of my youth is seldom heard of now; and although the present day novelist has not yet developed the hardihood to weave a romance about the youth of twenty and the woman of forty, yet the situation is common enough and certainly has in it dramatic possibilities."

"How do you explain such unnatural social phenomena?" I interrupted. She answered slowly and thoughtfully:

*Wisdom vs. innocence* "I have thought about it much, and the only explanation I can find is that youth and beauty no longer satisfy a certain type of young man who may be found in numbers to-day. He prefers wisdom to innocence; maturity to

## MA BELLE'S STORY

beauty ; eyes that see through him rather than those which gaze at him in adoration. Ruby lips offer to him but slight attraction compared to lips which utter clever things ; and above all a man likes to be mothered by the woman he loves, and that undoubtedly accounts for much.

“Then, too, a man does not keep his different kinds of loving as distinct as does a woman. She knows her own heart ; and if she regards a man with daughterly, sisterly or friendly affection, she does not confuse it with love. But a man never forgets that he is a man, and the moment his heart is open toward a woman, the sex relation intrudes itself whether it has any right to or not. A man is too much dominated by sex consciousness to be able to discriminate clearly.”

“Then you believe it unsafe to depend upon the love of a man so much younger !” I interrupted.

“I will not say that, because I have known many instances where it has proved as firm *Begging the question* as a rock for the foundation of a happy married life. It depends upon the character

*A man's loves  
not well  
classified*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

of the man and of the woman, which is beginning the question."

"What then do you think of Mr. Morris and me as candidates for such a marriage?" I demanded bluntly.

Ma Belle arose with distinct agitation and went over to the window and stood there looking out, while her hands clasped and unclasped nervously; after a time she came back and standing before me said with obvious effort:

"Marian, dear child, I cannot help you by *Ma Belle's story* deciding for you; but if my own experience will help you, you shall have it. I will tell you what I thought never to tell to any one. You shall know my judgment about my own life, and perhaps that will help you."

"Do not tell me if it hurts you to do it," I cried.

"Yes, Marian, I owe it to you to tell you, and I shall tell you even though it hurts. You are so dear to me, so truly my own child that my experience belongs to you, and you shall get what of help it affords." We were silent for a moment, then she began :

## MA BELLE'S STORY

"I am supposed to approve of marriage; but if serene happiness were the only thing worth while in life I should certainly never advise anybody to get married. However, as a well balanced ration of joy, care and pain seem the best nourishment for the growth of the human soul, I can conscientiously recommend marriage as a 'good provider.' You know that I was left a widow when Paul was ten years old. My married life had not been a very happy one; Paul's father was a brilliant man and not a bad one, but he had feelings instead of judgment. Though I put my best abilities to the task, I could never predict what he would do or desire next. I soon grew to humor him as if he were a child, and in that attitude lay all the possibilities for happiness in our married life. I believe he was as happy with me as he could have been with anyone, nor do I believe that he missed the respect and honor which I would have so gladly given him.

"When all was over, I found that I had relied on myself so long, and so little on him that I took up the duties of life alone with no

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*The length of  
the heart-  
cycle* special effort. I devoted myself to the rearing and education of Paul, and you know the rest. I need not have lived alone, Marian, for good men and true have loved me and have shown it by their lives. The heart-cycle is ordinarily not very extended and I am bound to admit that the heart masculine is a swift repeater; but, Marian, two men whom I honor have remained single because of love of me. (I thought of Marvin Gray.)

*Love fills  
the void* "It was after you and Paul were married that I came to know well a man only a few years older than Paul himself. I cannot tell you the kind of man he was and is for various reasons. He came into my life when it was empty. (Dear Ma Belle, how little did she let us feel the emptiness of her life after I took Paul!) He understood me, a fact which seemed to me most marvellous; and without intrusion he came into my life and filled my thoughts. He was wonderful in his instincts and intuitions, and he had the elements of greatness in his character.

"I was forty-four and he thirty when he told me that he loved me and entreated me to be

## **MA BELLE'S STORY**

his wife. I loved him as I have loved no other man, and I told him so. I struggled as *When Love  
is in battle* you are struggling with the same problem, only my heart pleaded for him as your heart does not plead for Theodore Morris.

"I would not yield because I measured the results that would follow this disparity of ages after marriage. I did not feel equal to the strain of beginning life again with him. I think a chief evidence of growing old is an unwillingness to pay for experiences what they cost. I was too set in my own grooves to change and be his wife. How could I spend my energies making myself attractive, beautiful and interesting so that he would never miss what a younger woman would give him? I had lived that phase of my life once, and did not feel equal to living it over again. The handicap seemed too great and, Marian, *An evidence  
of growing  
old* I sent him away. After Paul died he came back to me; and that time it was harder to deny him than it had been before. But my decision was made and I would not yield to him nor to my own heart.

"Ever since that time, I have questioned

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*The barter of  
happiness for  
wisdom*

the wisdom of my decision. I have been lonely, so lonely for him. And though the wisdom of the world would approve my act, I am still wondering if I did not do a vital and permanent wrong. He has never married, and has gone bravely on with his work as I knew he would. I should hold in contempt a man who did not live strongly because I could not live at his side.

"Marian, neither he nor anyone else has ever known the heights and depths of my madness. Sometimes I see him and we speak of our love ; and the moments spent with him are so ecstatically happy that I cannot remember them afterwards.

*When the  
heart pleads*

"I hope that you will go home and think over carefully what I have said before you make your decision. If I thought that you loved Mr. Morris as I have loved my lover all these years, I would say, marry him and defy the world and common sense." She was silent for a moment and then said :

"I know you are wondering who this man is, but, of course I cannot tell you. I will only say that though you may have seen him, you do not know him."

## MA BELLE'S STORY

I arose too overcome with surprise and awe to say anything, but I knew she understood.

She came with me to the door, and as we stood there hand in hand, I again was conscious of her loveliness which age could not dim, and my heart went out to that man who loved her. As I left her I took a spray of the lilies from her bosom at which she whispered as a flush crept over her face :

"The room was filled with the odor of lilies-of-the-valley, and I wore them the night he told me that he loved me. They were in bloom again when he came back to me, and that is why I love them."

*Lilies-of-the-valley*

I kissed her and came away in a daze, holding in my hand helplessly the delicate flower I had taken. The world grew dark and I could not see where I was walking, for I had suddenly remembered that bunch of faded lilies-of-the-valley inadvertently discovered in Tom Carroll's desk—and then I knew.

MAY 31ST :—She said I did not know him, dear Ma Belle, that lie was so white that it *A shining lie* fairly shone ! Of course she would not let me

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

suspect that it was Tom. For the sake of helping me she could confide to me her own story, but his secret must be kept inviolate.

It is all so plain now, for every word she said applies to him perfectly. He is a few years older than Paul, who was born before Ma Belle was eighteen. And how could Tom be with her so intimately and not love her, for she is the most interesting woman in the whole round world. If they had married she would have retained all her charm for him, even if she lived to the age of ninety. Any one associated with her would have to be blind and deaf not to love her. Tom Carroll could not help it, and so he has gone on nobly and bravely, living his life parallel with that of the woman he loves, even though he might not live it with her.

As for myself, it does not matter. I have  
*Between the upper and the lower mill-stones*  
not been so foolish as to care so much that I cannot meet this revelation as becomes his friend and her daughter. Nor do I think I have anything to repent; how could I help caring very much for a man so true and strong—a man so brave and unselfish as he!

## MA BELLE'S STORY

I am glad that I had discernment enough to comprehend his nobility and care for him as I have done. I trust in the end I shall prove myself worthy of these two, who have turned so resolutely away from the tragedy of their two lives and have with steady eyes confronted the future, each alone.

JUNE 1ST:—To-day there came a package from Ma Belle, and a little note which says:

**DEAR MARIAN:**

I told you that no one knew the heights and depths of my madness. I found to-day these *Life-blood a stultifying ink* verses and I send them to you and hope that you will read them. They are not poetry, for they were written in my life's blood and life's blood is a stultifying ink. True art can only come through distance and perspective; but these were written at the storm center. I think it is a relief to have you know the truth.

Lovingly,

**MA BELLE.**

I have read these verses and I will read them again to you, my Confessor. Not because you will appreciate them but because it hurts to read them. I do not think I am

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Better have remained gregarious*  
jealous. Jealousy is such a mean, insane emotion that we had better have remained gregarious than to have developed so contemptible a passion. But it all hurts, and I wish I could get away from it.

*Woman's limits, in understanding woman*  
These verses reveal to me a woman I have never known. We women understand each other except on one side, and that we never understand. A man understands this side first of all, though he may be unable to comprehend anything else in us.

### LILIES-OF-THE-VALLEY.

White, gleaming lily bells  
Your fairy music wells  
    Into a chime  
Of perfume on the air,  
Proclaiming everywhere  
    Glad spring-time.

As o'er my senses steals  
The incense of your peals,  
    My breath comes fast;—  
A flood-tide beats and breaks  
Against a heart that aches;  
Your subtle fragrance makes  
    Me live the past.

## MA BELLE'S STORY

Ring, pearly lily bells,  
The saddest of your knells  
    For me, your friend,  
For a love born not to die,  
For a grief without a cry,  
For a soul that questions, "Why?"  
    Unto the end.

May, 1886.

## BARREN VICTORY.

I have conquered ; the battle is done;  
    I gaze on the field of my slain.  
By counting my loss, I have won ;  
    Despair is the meed of my gain.  
  
The struggle was bitter, and now  
    Pale Victory stands at my side;  
Though laurels are fresh on her brow,  
    They fail her grim visage to hide.  
  
I have conquered. Henceforth I may dream  
    How precious, how infinite sweet  
Would life and this empty world seem  
    Had the rapture been mine of defeat.

July, 1890.

## GOOD NIGHT.

Dear heart, you said "good night,"  
    And the dim stars vaguely watched  
You vanish from my sight.

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

Good night, yea, surely good,—  
Because you came God-sent  
And by my side had stood.

Good *night*, yea, *night* for *ay*,  
For when you left me there,  
You took with you the day.

October, 1890.

## A BIRTHDAY GREETING.

What have the years unto thee given ?  
A life fair and strong !  
Yea, though to it belong that human strength  
temptation riven,  
Which faceth bravely wrong.

What shall the years unto thee bring ?  
The subtle gift to know  
That other lives are built by gaunt strife's meas-  
uring,  
The fairest even so.

What doth the heart that loves thee so  
Bring unto thee this day ?  
One happy thought, I pray !  
It would bring weal ;—it bringeth woe,  
And love and love alway.

December, 1894.

## MA BELLE'S STORY

### BOWED DOWN.

Thy burdens bow thee down, Beloved,  
But I cannot repine,  
Since only when thy head is bowed  
My eyes may look in thine.

And when thy eyes meet mine, Beloved,  
Life's better gifts I see :  
Great life and love, and the loneliness  
Of a Gethsemane.

January, 1897.

### THE LOVING CUP.

Wherefore hath our loving cup  
Of jewelled handles three ?  
A guest this night sits at our board,  
With veiled form and dark eyes lowered,  
Sweetheart, who may she be ?

We rise to drink, and lift the cup  
By jewelled handles three.  
Sweetheart, 't is Fate ; she giveth first  
The cup unto our lips athirst,  
Then drinks to thee and me.

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

The draught within the loving cup,  
Which brimmeth o'er for three,  
Was drawn from Lethe's darkened stream,  
And now, sweetheart, life is the dream,  
Love, the reality.

June, 1896.

## OUR STARS.

Where are our stars to-night, sweetheart?  
The clouds are hanging low,  
Gray clouds that move not hence, sweetheart,  
Though driving west-winds blow.  
Are your skies dark or bright, sweetheart?  
Alas! I may not know.

When my stars are lost from sight, sweetheart,  
My heart doth make this plea  
To the powers of might and night, sweetheart,  
That you the stars still see.  
God keep you in the light, sweetheart,  
Though darkness falls on me.

June, 1908.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE VIOLIN MAKES LOVE TO THE PIANO WITH STARTLING RESULTS

JUNE 3D:—Dear Confessor, after all you are my only help. Ma Belle instead of helping, has made it worse. I met Theodore down town to-day when I was trying to keep my mind on some necessary marketing and shopping. He gave me one long and questioning look and then took his place at my side without asking leave, and I at once felt the sympathy and help which he was mutely offering to me. Every cadence of his voice in our very commonplace conversation told me that he was giving himself to me because I was in need; he comforted the bare and aching place and I let myself rest, sustained by his ministrations. Though no word of deeper meaning was said, I came home cheered and strengthened by his subtle understanding of me.

*The best confessor of all*

*The dangers of sympathy*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*The conditions of true marriage*  
In the whirlpool of emotion in which I have been helplessly drifting around and around since that day with mamma, I had almost forgotten that this problem of T. M. is immediately before me. The temptation is to take what comforts and helps; I feel the instinct of seeking shelter in his arms from this tempest of loneliness and despair. Under the stress of it all it is hard to remember the great truth that marriage is never true and right unless the two give equally, even though they take unequally. I am afraid of my own weakness—afraid that I shall yield to his will rather than to my own sense of right and justice.

JUNE 4TH :—Oh, how can mortals be so blind, *so* blind! It seems as if there were nothing left for me these days but shock after shock of awakening.

*Perilous restlessness* All day yesterday I wrestled with my problem, and the more I wrestled, the more reckless I became. There is a factor of restlessness in recklessness which is most dangerous. We do not so much desire to do reck-

## THE VIOLIN MAKES LOVE TO PIANO

less deeds as to do something, no matter what, to change present conditions.

Last night Theodore came with his violin to play for me, "If we could only be left alone for a few moments," he whispered. But Hilda chanced to come in and of course the two played together. I was relieved by Hilda's opportune appearance for, truth to tell, I was afraid of being left alone with him and his heart-pleading violin; I felt the need of a brief reprieve.

Somewhat late in the evening we three were left alone; as the two began playing the music they knew I loved best I, as usual, curled up on the sofa and shut my eyes to listen. At first they did not play as well as usual, but finally it went better and it seemed to me that I had never heard them play so perfectly; they were evidently attuned to each other's moods. They played Chopin's Nocturnes and Preludes, Godard's *Berceuse*, and *The Swan* by Saint Saëns, and a Beethoven Sonata.

I did not care for their music, although I realized that it had never before been so

*Perfectly  
attuned*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Love crosses  
the bridge to  
music land*

thrilling. I could not find even the this-world end of my bridge to music land. I was weltering in my own inner misery and could not be called out of myself. Restlessly I opened my eyes and looked at the players; they were under the full blaze of the Welsbach light and were both facing nearly in my direction. They had just finished the Aria on the G string and Hilda was as pale as death. In strong contrast his face was aglow; there was fire in his eyes, a bright color burned in his usually pale cheeks, and even his moustache could not hide the tremulous tenderness of his lips. For the first time I saw his inner being revealed in his features.

*The  
heart-plead-  
ing violin*

As he placed another piece of music on the piano in front of her, his hands were trembling so that the sheet was shaking; as he leaned over to put it in place his eyes must have songht hers; I could not see his face for the moment but Hilda's was in full view, and a wave of red surged over it from brow to chin, then retreated leaving it more pallid than before. They began playing Beethoven's *Adelaïda*, and never in my life had I heard

## THE VIOLIN MAKES LOVE TO PIANO

such impassioned music. The violin pleaded and pleaded until its heart seemed breaking ; the piano responded sweet and profoundly sad ; and I was overcome by the music even as I lay there stupefied by my discovery.

As soon as I could think, it all became plain ; and I had now gained the *key to the situation* <sup>A quite unexpected key to the situation</sup> mysterious moods and actions of this man who had been wooing me. At first he believed he loved me, and was calm and masterful and sure in his methods for winning me. After Hilda came and they played together so constantly, he became moody and grim, and his wooing was evidently mere bravado to convince himself that he was loyal to me. I must have been mad not to have seen it all long ago.

Whatever the music this night revealed to them of heart-struggle and love, I do not know ; but it cleared my understanding, brought back my self-control, re-established my sanity and made me at once master of the situation. Before the last bars of *Adelaïda* were finished, I arose and thoughtfully tipped over a chair on my way toward

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

the piano and the absorbed musicians. As they stopped playing I exclaimed :

“ Oh, that wretched chair ! Please forgive me and it ! You two have fairly outdone yourselves to-night making music for me, and I can find no words to fittingly thank you with. I am certainly the most favored mortal in the whole world.”

*The safe  
arbor of the  
commonplace*

And thus by cheerful commonplaces, I brought them back to earth and its realities. I sent them home together, too, knowing well that despite the longing in his heart, he would be true to his avowal to me. I must confess also that I am quite willing to have him suffer a little ; it will widen and deepen his channel.

*A proper  
relation to  
the secrets of  
others*

Since I have come to my room, I have written him a letter. It is thus I give him his freedom without allowing him to suspect that I know the truth. It is a great source of personal power to know the secrets of others' lives, but it is vastly embarrassing to have them know that you have discovered such secrets independently. Listen to this

## THE VIOLIN MAKES LOVE TO PIANO

letter, Confessor, and I am very certain you will hardly dare to call me guileless.

MY DEAR THEODORE :

You have asked me for an answer to a very momentous question, and I have been coming to this answer little by little. I do not suppose you will ever know what a temptation you have been to me with your sympathy, understanding and love. But I have finally achieved sufficient strength to do what is right and be true to myself and to you.

I knew from the first that I could never love you as a wife ought to love ; but your love for me was so sweet and so comforting when I was needing comfort that I almost forgot what I could give in return.

It was a mirage, dear friend, and we have both wandered on and on toward it, hoping to see it materialize. But it remained always on our horizon ; at best, it was a paradise picture upside down.

I am going away from you, for I will not place myself in a position to be again tempted. And I believe with all my heart that when I come back we shall be better friends than ever before ; and that all temptation to twist our friendship into something closer will have been laid low.

Faithfully yours,

MARIAN.

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

I am going away so that he shall not see me until he has had time to orient himself. Probably he does not understand himself, men seldom do in such crises. I remember well when I read the *Choir Invisible*, I thought how true to man's nature was the character of John Gray. He thought he was in love with Amy when he was really in love with the Madam ; and he afterwards married another woman and was perfectly happy. Over and over I have been amazed at a man's capability for loving two or three simultaneously. With women it is far different : they love tandem, even though they change teams often.

*A gratuitous and flippant remark* All this sounds heartless and flippant, but it is a natural reaction. No one but you,

My Confessor, knows how truly relieved I am to have the Theodore Morris problem solve itself. When I think how near I came to spoiling his life and mine, I shiver. He was never in my straight road ; I found him when I was making a detour by a devious and blind *A blind trail* trail. I believe I could endure living the truth however hard it might be ; but it seems a quite unnecessary waste of energy to go

## THE VIOLIN MAKES LOVE TO PIANO

out of my way in order to endure the hardship of living a lie.

And yet the discovery which I made tonight was a shock to me ; not a terrible shock, but the sort that comes from sitting on the floor instead of the chair one expects to sit on. There is a most ignominious feeling about it all.

If you knew women well, you might think that though I love not my lover, I still might not like to yield him to another woman. But this is not so ; I would be entirely content and happy to see Theodore and Hilda happy together as husband and wife. I do not think there is any jealousy in my composition, because of my sincere belief that if a love is mine, it cannot be alienated ; and if it belongs to another, I do not desire it. And, too, I love Hilda and I love—Ma Belle. Moreover, my creed has always been to face things as they are and not to cover my eyes with my hands in order not to see them. But it hurts to face some things, little god, it hurts !

*An  
ignominious  
experience*

*Love that is  
true cannot be  
alienated*

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A FLIGHT TO THE HILLS. FRIENDS' MEETING

JUNE 6TH:—I hope your sudden flight across country to this beautiful spot, and *An excellent cement* the exchange of your carven temple for a shelf adorned with a linen lambrequin broidered with extraordinary fuchsias has not made you either dizzy or irritable, My Confessor. You see, I could not help eloping with you. As you may have inferred, life has been a little too much for me of late, so I gathered up the fragments of myself and brought them away; and here, in this limpid quiet and peacefulness, I will set them together again and trust that ultimately not a crack will be discernible.

From your shelf beneath my little uneven *Mine own hills* mirror, which makes me look as wobbly as I feel, you may look out between snowy curtains across a grassy dooryard, thence across

## A FLIGHT TO THE HILLS

a valley to a range of eastern hills. One of the pleasantest physical sensations of my life was the feeling of the soft knot-grass beneath my little bare feet, when in my childhood I was allowed to remove my shoes and stockings and play for a brief but rapturous hour in this sunny dooryard. And those are mine own hills which I lived with and dreamed with during the years of girlhood, when all the great world that lay beyond that horizon was one of high hopes and entrancing happiness. Now that I know just what there is in that great world, I hurry back to love my hills still more for what they fence out. This is my life-saving-station, and I came none too soon.

The lady with fair face and quirly white hair, who asked in a tone of amazement this morning concerning Your Serene Highness, "What on the broad footstool is this thing on your shelf, Marian?" is Aunt Sylvia. She and Uncle Stephen came here to live when Aunt Emily died, and they are a part of the beauty, the peace and the healing which overflows the place. These two wholesome, youth-

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

ful elderly ones are twins, and have lived *Uncle Stephen* together, barring the two brief years of Uncle Stephen's married life, since they were born. I can see Uncle Stephen now, smoking his pipe in his big chair on the porch of the L. His cheeks are rosy and his blue eyes are merry as he looks up at the robin in her nest above his head; and his voice is soft and reassuring as he greets a hen, coming slowly toward him with stately step and sidewise stare to discover if he has anything in his pocket for her to eat. And now he has taken up his New York *Evening Post* and is nodding vigorously as he reads some editorial.

*Editorial pepper-sauce* The pepper-sauce of that editorial page is quite as necessary to his happiness as his daily meat.

I came without warning, as I usually do; and my welcome was as warm as if specially prepared. Aunt Sylvia tucked me into bed last night as she used to when as a girl I spent my vacations here. And I put my head on that blessed pillow and slept as I have not slept before for weeks.

## A FLIGHT TO THE HILLS

JUNE 7TH:—I wish I had taken you with me this morning, to the great woods on the “templed hills.” Though the sun was shining, the leaf-canopy above me was so thick that I was walking in twilight. I found a tree bent into a seat, into which I used to clamber with a sense of happy proprietorship, and there I sat me down to listen to the bird concert. A vireo was asking querulous questions in the distance ; a wood thrush near by gave out his notes boldly, fortissimo ; a veery was so in love with his song that he repeated it four times, lingeringly ; and now and then a hermit thrush sent his heavenly voice echoing through the twilight spaces, music so exquisite that we might not bear more than a single phrase. Then, lest I be drunk with melody, the oven bird called “teacher, teacher,” to bring me back to earth. Yes, back to earth ; but not an earth of trouble and perplexity ; an earth, instead, where green forests grow beset with meadows aglow with buttercups, overarched with blue skies.

You who know something of my inner turmoil during the preceding days, may have

*The ministry  
of the birds*

*A good place  
to live in*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Antiseptic thinking* difficulty in understanding how I have so suddenly changed my inner as well as my outer world. It is my way, dear Idol, when I am hit, not to stay and waste myself in further struggle, but to flee from the battle field, turn my face to green fields and sunny skies ; and by keeping my thoughts thoroughly antiseptic, let the hurts heal through Nature's own kindly treatment.

*Conscience in apogee* The Master evinced his wisdom when he went to the desert to be tempted, it was much safer than to have remained in the haunts of men ; never to be alone is in itself demoralizing. Though this beautiful spot is hardly a desert, yet for me it is the delectable land of nowhere ; and the logical and delightful thing to do is to subside into a nobody. No introspections, no retrospections, no sack-cloth ; and ashes but an aid to the general fertility of the spiritual outlook. Even conscience soon becomes obsolete, because there is nothing here to exercise it. I suspect that hermits originally dwelt in hermitages so as to get away from all need of a conscience.

## A FLIGHT TO THE HILLS

JUNE 8TH :—This morning I went with Uncle Stephen to hoe corn ; it was planted in a *Hoeing* small field on the hill that faces the east, <sup>*corn*</sup> from which may be seen the windings of the creek around the bases of the interlacing hills. The corn was just peeping from the soft, purple mold, and Uncle Stephen explained :

“ All the rest of the corn on the farm is drilled in with a planter, and is harrowed and *Friendly* cultivated according to new-fangled notions ; <sup>*battle*</sup> but I plant and hoe this piece every year because I like to. If I could not give my old back some good stiff exercise hoeing corn, I am afraid I should soon get decrepit and useless.” He gently smoothed the fresh earth around the tender plants, proving skilfully that a hoe may caress as well as cut, and continued : “Thee knows the only fighting Friends may indulge in is against weeds, and their only approved weapon is the hoe. I love to work with the corn ; I think it is a beautiful plant from the time it sprouts until it is harvested. I like to think of it as the plant which gave our Pilgrim Fathers sustenance during those

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

first hard years, growing cheerfully for them between the stumps of their clearings where no civilized grain could grow. Did thee ever hear the ripening grain talk? It has a language of its own, and I often stand and listen to it whispering and whispering in corn talk, and wish I understood it better than I do."

Dear Uncle Stephen! He should have been

*Living poetry instead of writing it* using a pen instead of a hoe; but he is one of the blessed ones who live poetry instead of writing it. I sat under a tree at the edge of the field, and watched his sturdy arms in their snowy sleeves work havoc in the weed ranks; meanwhile I gave myself over to the beguilement of the meadow-larks' refrain. There are no words to express what their song means to me, perhaps happy tears would express it better than anything else.

JUNE 9TH :—This morning Aunt Sylvia said to me in her humorous way,

"What a fine world this would be if there *The curse of conjunctions* were no 'buts' or 'ifs' in it—no conjunctions at all except 'and.' I have always believed that conjunctions were the first inventions of

## A FLIGHT TO THE HILLS

the serpent. When his poor victims were put out of Eden, he hurled a lot of conjunctions after them by way of emphasizing their fallen condition."

That was a fine conception, little god ; how true that a happy and consistent world would *Nice, serene* need no conjunction but nice, serene "and." "and"  
Listen now : Marian was born, *and* grew up, *and* was naughty, *and* was good, *and* was happy at times, *and* died peacefully, *and* evanesced into Nirvana. Does n't that sound easy and simple ! Well, in this place, I shall soon eliminate my "buts" and "ifs" and "fors."

I have had a restful day ; I spent a good share of it in the hammock, gazing idly at the upland seas of meadow-grass undulating in the summer wind. I could not think for listening to the bobolinks ; ever since I was a child the bobolink song has tinkled itself joyously into the uttermost parts of my being. I gave myself up to it to-day and have grown in grace because of it. Who says this is a hard and perplexing world ? It is a world exactly right ; I am proud to be in any world that has in it a bobolink.

*The song of  
the bobolink  
leavens the  
world*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

JUNE 11TH :—A most interesting Sabbath *Organized worship* day ! It never occurred to me before, but of course you, being a Benighted Heathen, do do not know what Sunday is, do you ? We people of the western world are prone to organization ; and so we organize our worship, and put it all in one day of every seven, and call that day Sunday.

This morning I hope you noticed the utter *A First-day pilgrimage* stillness which pervaded this house ; even Maria in the kitchen did not rattle the dishes and pans as is her wont on week days. At ten the great carriage drawn by the plump farm-horses was at the door ; there was room in it for us all including Maria, and James the hired man, and Eleazer, the hired boy. It was a soft, misty morning and as we drove along by lush meadows, the trees were mere shadows in the fog. We dropped Maria at the Methodist, and James at the Baptist church, but Eleazer went on with us to the Quaker meeting house where I used to go when a child. It was as bare and as clean and peaceful as ever, but there were fewer people within it than of yore. Aunt Sylvia

## A FLIGHT TO THE HILLS

and Uncle Stephen sat on the high seats, facing the congregation, and a few other placid faces that I remembered looked down upon us from that eminence.

The meeting began and we sat long in silence. No temptation came to me now to break that blessed silence with profane shouting; it permeated my soul comfortingly. After Uncle Josiah Palmer had prayed, even as he used to pray employing the same words and thoughts, the sun broke through the clouds and illumined the room. In this flood of light there arose a man whom I did not know; his thin, sensitive face showed deep lines but it shone with peace and was as beautiful and clean cut as a cameo. There was something that smacked of the world and its vanities in his well fitting suit of gray, his white vest and the jaunty roll to the wide brim of his hat which he held in his hand as he talked; in a voice musical and vibrant he said :

“ ‘To give unto them beauty for ashes ; the oil of joy for mourning ; the garment of praise *An interesting* for the spirit of heaviness.’ How are we to *preacher*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Hardly an orthodox sermon*

do these good works for our fellow men of which Isaiah tells us ? Is it by following our own devious ways, or by running along the smoothly beaten track of the wisdom of others ? Nay, nay, wisdom was never meant for paving our ways ; wisdom is the final compensation which we attain at the end of our journey over the rough, unbroken paths of self. Wisdom is the highest gift of discipline. Which, think you, gained most, Lazarus to whom all gifts were denied or Midas whose wish was fulfilled ? We know not which gives us the greater discipline, to get what we desire or to be denied it ; both are good if thereby we gain wisdom. Even the exchange of integrity for wisdom may not be a poor barter for some souls, since wisdom brings a wider comprehension of our fellow men, and the temptations which beset them. What though we lose the qualities which we most prize, if by so doing we may be led to help the fallen ! I would call no barter poor, if it assured me that sympathy and understanding which would permit another soul to stand naked before me and say ' See me as I am.'

## A FLIGHT TO THE HILLS

Greatness may come to us when we least suspect it and when we feel most bitterly the enormity of our failures. For, how a man must be like God, to lead another to say in his presence 'See me as I am'!"

*Greatness  
may come  
when least  
expected*

He sat down; a bumble-bee buzzed up and down a pane; through the open doors we heard a chipping sparrow singing like a happy grasshopper in the lilacs, and an oriole in the elms trying a bit of the Waldvogel's song in Siegfried. And yet all these sounds but emphasized the silence which laved the spirit as does the cool waters of a wayside brook, the tired and soiled feet of the wayfarer on dusty highways.

*The soul  
bathed in  
silence*

Aunt Sylvia arose, her pretty hair escaping from her plain bonnet and curling in a most worldly way about her sweet face. The Spirit moved her to say: "Many among us who are able to keep the letter of the law, suffer because we are not able to keep the spirit of it as well. Let us beware of vain reasoning! The letter of the law is meant as a guide for our acts in dealing with our fellow men. The spirit of the law is our own struggle for in-

*The Spirit  
moves Aunt  
Sylvia*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

terpretation of the law to ourselves. A hair's breadth lying between 'did' and 'did not' is as good as all space so far as our relations to others are concerned. So let us not reproach ourselves that we keep only the letter of the law; if we keep it well and prayerfully, after a time rebellion will cease and we shall be at one with the spirit."

After she ceased speaking, Uncle Stephen *The Friendly hand-shaking* arose and began the hand-shaking which indicated that the meeting was at an end.

Many came forward to greet me in the true Friendly way; among them were the friends of my mother whom I had known when a child. Finally, the stranger who had spoken such extraordinary sentiments for a Friend, came forward and Aunt Sylvia introduced him thus:

"Marian, thee surely remembers Gerritt *An old playmate* Howland." I smiled involuntarily, for that name brought back vividly an incident of my early life. Aunt Emily, who had withdrawn from the Friends to join the Episcopal church, felt thereby justified in enjoying to a certain extent the vanities of the

## A FLIGHT TO THE HILLS

world. At my earnest insistence she had allowed me the privilege of wearing a hoop-skirt, which at that time was more or less the fashion. One day when I was dressed in my diminutive hoops Gerritt Howland and his sister came visiting; the latter was near my own age, and Gerritt was a great overgrown boy several years my senior. But he condescended to play with us and in teaching us the game of "Follow my leader," led to the roof of the hen-house and leaped thence to the ground. I was not to be outdone, even by a big boy, and so I followed him; but I was not to the crinoline born and as I jumped from the roof a huge nail in the gable caught my hoops and there I hung suspended head downward, until my elders rescued me to my intense mortification, and the abolition forever of hoops. Could it be that this man, strong and beautiful of face, the daring preacher of amazing doctrines, had developed from the lively boy whose chubby face I remember so well? He took my hand and greeted me gravely, saying :

*Annoying suspense*

"I remember well my little playmate, and

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

I am glad to meet her again." There was a magnetic quality in the man that made his commonplace words mean much, and his clasp of my hand sent an electric thrill along my arm. I could hardly wait until we were on our way home to ask what could be told of Gerritt Howland. Aunt Sylvia replied:

*The hard school of common sense* just ordinary common-sense truths, and Gerritt was one of that sort. He grew up wild and rebellious and finally left home and went to the city. What happened to him there we never knew, but a good many years ago he met with a great change of heart and mind. He is doing a good work in the great city—'settlement' work people call it, but it makes him cross to hear it called by that name, for some reason or other. He spends a part of every summer with his sister, Letitia, who is a widow and lives on the old homestead. He is a great help to her in carrying on the place; and he is the best preacher we have had in meeting for many a year."

"A man who has had to struggle for his

## A FLIGHT TO THE HILLS

upward trend, knows how to reach the souls of other strugglers," I declared. Uncle Stephen responded, teasingly:

"Sylvia does n't care about his faults as long as he looks handsome and preaches well. The Russians have a proverb, 'Not dear because good, but good because dear.'"  
*Good and dear, or dear and good?*

"Nonsense, Stephen! Thee likes to hear Gerritt preach as well as I do, and thee knows thee does; he is moved to say things which are true and interesting."

"There are two things which make a man interesting to a woman, Sylvia; one is for her to discover in him a weakness when she knows he has great strength; the other is for her to discover strength in him when she knows he is very weak. To which class does thee claim that Gerritt belongs?" asked Uncle Stephen with a wicked little twinkle in his blue eyes.  
Aunt Sylvia retorted:

"Just being interesting, anyhow, is a virtue in this commonplace world."  
*Two diverse paths to woman's favor*

"A virtue that brings its own reward readily."  
*One virtue sure of reward*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"Stephen, thee is so exasperating," said Aunt Sylvia placidly.

"I am not exasperating, I am only just," he argued.

"Sympathy and charity are the upholstery *A thin cushion* of the judgment seat, Stephen; and thee'd better be careful or thy cushion will be very thin," was Aunt Sylvia's last word. The chief entertainment of the two is teasing each other.

The gay yellow and white, many-gabled cottage came in sight; this house was Aunt Emily's first venture after she withdrew from the Friends. I spoke of it and Aunt Sylvia said, in smiling reminiscence:

"Yes, Emily grew tired of plainness. I *Aunt Emily's dash for freedom* remember perfectly her first worldly dress; it was a combination of brilliant green and salmon pink and Stephen told her that she looked like a lobster salad in it. And then she must build this house different in form and gayer in color than any other in the country. It was as if all the rebellion against plainness which had been tempting the family for generations found expression in her. Thee

## A FLIGHT TO THE HILLS

remembers how passionately she loved ritualism and no church could be too 'high' for her. Once mother visited Emily in the city and they attended service which was very elaborate and long ; after they returned home, Emily felt very happy and triumphant and asked, 'Did you ever witness anything so interesting or beautiful?' 'Yes, Emily,' said mother 'it was both interesting and beautiful, but it was no way to spend the Sabbath.'"

*Too much of  
an entertain-  
ment*

"Perhaps it is because Sylvia has been able to conscientiously live in a gay house which she could not help inheriting, that she has been able to retain *her* plain ways," said Uncle Stephen mischievously.

JUNE 12TH :— Little god, maybe you know more about the impulses of little beings than *Singed wings* I do ; if so I wish you would tell me why, on a damp, warm night like this, the small, winged creatures hurl themselves so enthusiastically into the flame of my lamp, as they are doing this moment, leaving as a result of the blissful holocaust nothing but a bad odor? Is it not a pity that singed wings are quite as

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

*Life's  
antitheses  
not limited to  
mankind*

malodorous as other singed substances! Some of these flame-loving moths, having failed to incinerate themselves in the lamp, seem wild with desire to commit suicide in my ink bottle. I wonder if it is because of disappointment in not reaching the light that they choose as an alternative, liquid darkness! Life seems full of antitheses, even for moths. I will close my window and prevent this wild self-destruction; —and now they are beating their wings against the glass and cannot understand what deters them. One great noctuid flutters up and down the pane, his eyes like rubies, afire with desire. What good fortune for him that the glass is there, although I know he hates it.

*An unkind  
confessor*

What is that you say, Impertinent Idol? That I ought to understand from experience the dangers of fluttering around flame, the ignominy of singed wings, and the relief to be found in ink! And that I should appreciate to the fullest extent the blessedness of the restraining pane! I did not dream that you could be so inconsiderate as to say such cruel things to one who has evidently confessed to you not wisely, but too much.

## CHAPTER XXVII

**MAELA DISCOURSES ON WIDOWERS. GERRITT  
HOWLAND COMES TO TEA**

JUNE 13TH;—Everything here conduces to cheerfulness and a wholesome attitude *Maria* toward life. Even *Maria*, our hired girl, is an influence in this direction; the word “girl” as applied to her is purely a matter of custom and has no reference to her age, for she is a woman of fifty, keen and capable and of the good old New England type. Her large, airy kitchen with its yellow painted floor and windows hung with white muslin curtains is one of the pleasantest rooms I was ever in. I like to assist her in the dish-washing, or sit in her comfortably cushioned Boston rocker watching her deft movements while I talk with her. This morning Uncle Stephen in passing through the kitchen remarked on the great

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

amount of rain we have had this season, and  
Maria answered,

"We ought to be thankful! Last year it  
*An* was so dry here that the buckwheat was so  
*embarrassing*  
*crop* small the bees had to get down on their hands  
and knees to get the honey; and folks talked  
of lathering and shaving the fields in order to  
harvest the crop."

Maria is very devoted to Uncle Stephen and  
*Widowers as*  
*seen by Maria* said of him one day, "Stephen Southard is the  
salt of the earth, and a most remarkable be-  
having widower. He hain't ever looked at a  
woman since that little, pale-faced, curly-  
haired wife of his'n died. Now most men, just  
as soon as they are widowers, start on the dead  
run for the first woman that heaves into sight;  
they are lots different in that respect from  
widows, who always wait and pick and choose  
the man they want, if he 's to be had. But a  
'widower ain't no wise particular about the  
'who,' his mind is so set on the 'what.' Land  
sakes! I don't wonder most married women  
die hard; I suppose they are thinking about  
what spectacles their husbands will be making  
of themselves as soon as their eyes close and

## GERRITT HOWLAND COMES TO TEA

afore they fairly reach the first landing on the golden stairs. If I ever get married I am goin' to outlive the unfortunit man just so that folks won't find out what a fool he naturally is when he is left alone."

"I wonder that you did not get married long ago, Maria; Aunt Sylvia says you have had many good chances," I said, hoping to lead her on further.

"I don't know about the *goodness* of my chances! Sometimes all it takes to make a *A poor show* circus out of life is two fools and a ring; and I 've always been afraid it would n't be worth the price of admission," quoth Maria.

JUNE 14TH:—I spent this sultry afternoon in the hammock in the orchard. A weak little breeze felt its way around and touched my face with cool, listless fingers. The hens trailed past me in Indian file, each one keeping a suspicious eye upon me as she passed, with beak open, gasping for breath. A vireo in the tree above me remarked with sweet garrulousness, "Wait, may-be; wait, may-be," as if I had not already had too much of

*An afternoon  
in the orchard*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

waiting and maybes ! Two yellow butterflies zigzagged down the orchard aisle and called my attention to a view of the hills through the vista of brown-green apple branches. These hills are not great and rugged, but are softened and beautified by long life. They are rounded and meadowed and forested, even to the high far ones which mingle with the clouds that pile up, and cushion the horizon. They are the kind of hills which the drifting cloud-shadows love to caress. So I looked at them and forgot the heat of the day and the fret of existence, and my afternoon was serene.

My serenity has vanished to-night for I am physically afraid ! I wonder if thunder affects your teak sensibilities unpleasantly ! I hope not, since I must get courage from you to face that great black cloud which walls up the western horizon, wherein the lightning makes jagged gates which shut with a crash that makes the earth tremble. To be blotted out by a thunder-bolt always seemed to me to be an unwarrantable intrusion upon human rights. I think I will keep awake to-night and

## GERRITT HOWLAND COMES TO TEA

watch this lightning, lest it lap me up as a cat  
laps milk.

JUNE 15TH :—Gerritt Howland and his sister were invited here to-night, and it was a *Company for tea* most interesting occasion. What, with all of our many-course dinners, have we which can compete with one of these old-fashioned teas: grandmother's china, as thin as a wafer; beautiful old linen, polished as only Maria's iron can polish; biscuits and honey fit for the gods; ham sliced so thin it resembled rose leaves, and damson preserves, delicious beyond description. But even the feast was not what made this evening so interesting; although it did add an artistic element not to be ignored, with Uncle Stephen in his fresh gray linen suit at the head of the table, opposite Aunt Sylvia arrayed in her white muslin with "lavender sprigs" trailing through it.

After tea we sat on the piazza, Uncle Stephen smoking his dear pipe and our guest a cigar which suggested the city club. Gerritt sat near me and in some break in the general conversation I asked:

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

"Were there ever anywhere else such eastern hills for western shadows to climb?"

"They remind me of Indian sachems around a camp fire, with their heads bowed upon their knees," he replied.

"Yesterday I climbed to the top of the west hill and was surprised to find that this eastern range looks like veritable mountains."

*An evidence  
of having  
attained a  
higher plane*

"One of the interesting facts about hills, as well as about some other things, is that the higher we get, the higher they seem. Sometimes we may doubt our growth upward, but if we find our horizon widening, and the world in our neighborhood seeming to uplift, then may we be comforted."

"I wish I had thy power of coining inner experience into the currency of speech," I replied enviously.

"Gerritt, she has hit the nail on the head," said Uncle Stephen, who had been listening. "Whatever people may say about inspiration, it is chiefly the gift of speech which makes the preacher."

"Uncle Stephen believes in the inalienable right of asses to bray," laughed Gerrit, and

## GERRITT HOWLAND COMES TO TEA

Uncle chuckled appreciatively. Then I took up the cudgels :

“After all, true speech is inspiration ; a silent realm stretches in limitless space around each of us ; and only through the gift of genius is some word brought over from that realm of silence to the realm of the senses. The one true word is said and the millions who are dumb, rejoice.”

*The coining  
of the gold of  
silence into  
speech*

“Thee will spoil Gerritt, Marian, as all the rest of us do,” said Letitia fondly.

“It depends upon what a man thinks of himself, and not upon what others think of him, whether he can be spoiled or not,” answered Gerritt soberly ; then turning to me, “Marian, let’s go and climb the big gray boulder where we used to play ; perhaps it may be smaller than it was in those days.”

“Better go and look at the hen-house, too,” suggested Uncle Stephen, laughing, as we left the porch.

“I wanted to talk to thee alone, Marian Lee,” said Gerritt as we followed the pasture path up the hill. “I saw in thy face when I met thee on First Day, that thee has discov-

*A compre-  
hensive  
question*

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

ered for thyself what sort of a world it is that lies over there beyond these hills, and I wanted a chance to ask thee what were thy conclusions."

"I found it a volcanic old ball, and have spent most of my years schooling myself to walk on hot lava," said I, laughing.

"And the serenity that shines from thy face means simply that thee has become accustomed!"

"It is not the serenity of cold storage, if that is what thee means," I answered, still scoffing. "And thee, what has thee found in that world beyond the hills?"

"That in it we manage somehow to do all  
*What we*  
*found in the*  
*world beyond*  
*the hills* of the things of which we, at first, disapprove, and thereby grow into great knowledge and wisdom, and learn for a certainty the reasons for our disapproval."

"And the good of it and the bad?" queried I.

"Oh, the unhappiness of being good and bad for others when we are simply *being ourselves!*"

"True, personal influence is an appalling

## GERRITT HOWLAND COMES TO TEA

mystery. It is the splash made by the pebble, and the resulting waves may require a life-time to measure," I acquiesced.

"It would surely be vastly better if we could grow up without exerting influence; and wait until we are ripe before we splash into other people's lives." He turned and looked at me earnestly, "One thing I am sure of, thee has lived facing the world, not thyself. Thine is not the uneasy head that wears an in-growing crown!"

*Uneasy lies  
the head  
that wears an  
in-growing  
crown*

"No, I do not spend my time dropping plummets into my inner deeps. Deeps were not made just for fathoming, but to sail over with a fair wind. But, tell me if thee can, what is all this discipline of experience for?"

"That we may finally be neither too narrow to comprehend nor too broad to discriminate."

"If that is the end in view, I fear too many of us are bowed and broken reeds. Has thee discovered any good use for broken reeds?" I asked lightly.

"For Pan to pipe on if they are broken in right lengths," he replied in the same vein;

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

then added more seriously, "If the tone be good, why need we ask what broke the reed ?

*The tuning of Pan-pipes* Thee remembers in the old grammar the definition of a verb as signifying 'to be, to do, to suffer' ! Reverse the order and it is a good formula for making character. To suffer first, then, as a resource, to do all the things which one can lay hands to, and then finally, to be."

We were now standing by the boulder, and he leaped to the top with his old agility, and extending his hand said, merrily :

"Come up, little playmate !" then when I stood at his side he continued, almost tenderly, "I cannot tell in mere words how glad I am to have my playmate with me again."

"Jump me down and I will race thee back to the house," I commanded, and suiting the action to the word, we soon arrived at the porch, flushed and breathless.

"Thee is not good any more ; thee used to let me beat thee down the hill," I declared reproachfully.

*Too true to be good* "I am no longer too good to be true," he laughed.

## GERRITT HOWLAND COMES TO TEA

"Thee had better be careful and not be too true to be good," cautioned Aunt Sylvia, falling in with our mood; Gerritt glanced at me appreciatively.

The remainder of the visit was pleasing in every particular. Gerritt proved a mental stimulus to the others as well as to myself; as they were leaving he said to me so that no one else heard, "I shall see thee again very soon."

I have been thinking it all over since I came up to my room, and find that instead of being as pleased as I ought to be with such an evening, I am fearful and half annoyed. This question of sex is, in this day of social complexity, a disturbing element. What a pity it is, Mr. Teak-wood, that protoplasm should have split, back in geologic times, and thus have been obliged to climb down the ladder of the ages on two feet instead of sliding down on one. If it had put all its energies into roots, stems and leaves, and had avoided meddling with vertebræ and souls and human beings, this would have been a peaceful and well-behaved planet, and a credit to the solar system.

*A protoplasmic blunder*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

All this means that I should like nothing better than to be Gerritt Howland's play-mate; but because I am a self-conscious woman, I am obliged to think absurd, self-conceited, foreboding thoughts about the possibility of his falling in love with me; I am disgusted! At the same time I know that there was more in Gerritt's greeting than the mere pleasure of renewing an old acquaintance. All too soon this Eden of mine will, I fear, develop a serpent. However, I will not worry about it. If I have stumbled upon the trail of that "most subtle of all beasts," as the Bible naïvely calls it, there is only the merest tip of its tail in sight; so I will ignore it and go on with my happy forgetfulness of life and its duties.

JUNE 16TH :—Do you not think it wonderful  
*Through sense to spirit* that I have shed all my perplexities like soiled garments, and live so wholly in the present? All this day I have given myself over to June and its glory without reserve. I reveled in the fragrance of the old-fashioned cinnamon roses which hedge one side of the lawn. The

## GERRITT HOWLAND COMES TO TEA

green of the meadows, the blue of the sky, and the blood-red petals of the great peonies made me breathless with excitement. When I leaned against the old sycamore by the brook, and stroked the soft velvet of its trunk freshly freed from bark, I had a sudden comprehension of the riotous blisses of the satyrs. The songs of the bobolink, oriole and meadow-lark thrilled and filled me with ecstasy. All of these appeals to the senses intoxicate me; and then, by some strange alchemy, sensuous joy is transmuted into spiritual strength and refreshment.

JUNE 17TH :—No letter has come to me until to-day. I told the family not to write unless *Postal bondage* I was needed. So when Uncle Stephen held up this letter, as he drove into the yard this afternoon, I went out to get it with a reluctance that would have surprised him if he had noticed it. But my feelings were quite unnecessary, for the letter is a most amusing one from Joe. I suppose you will understand, Wise One, that Joe means to convey to us the information that Millie will have none of

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

him ; but that he has not lost courage, and that, in the end, he expects to win.

DEAR MARNIE :

*A Coleopterous preacher*

A June-bug has just made me a visit, and I have been making some interesting and illuminating observations upon his personality and methods. I always did admire the *aplomb* with which a June-bug encounters facts. He comes sailing in through the window, never doubting that the earth and all thereon is his, and flies about in cheerful zig-zags, proclaiming by his buzz that his path is toward the light. Bang, he goes into the wall ! this is his first fact, and the frankness with which he admits it is beautiful to behold ; he falls backward heavily, waves his legs in the air in a manful effort to right himself. Then he dazedly folds his wings, tucking them untidily beneath his wing-covers, and sits down to think, and readjust his philosophy on a new basis which shall take account of this newly discovered fact.

*A philosophy which ignores facts*

After a few moments of contemplation he lifts one leg high in the air, in a most derisive gesture, as much as to say : " Oh pahaw ! I would not give a fig for a philosophy of life that could be affected by anything so sordid as a fact !" And up he flies with courage unabated and starts all over again. What though he is next prostrated through loftily ignoring the chandelier ; the result is the same. The

## GERRITT HOWLAND COMES TO TEA

light is to him the only thing in the universe that  
is worth while, and knocking himself senseless  
against stupid obstacles is only incidental to final  
attainment. He knows that true victory lies in the  
struggle rather than in the attainment and I have  
just addressed him thus: "Oh, noble June-bug !  
Teach me to develop a philosophy of action which  
shall not be weak and paltry enough to be affected  
by facts. Teach me to fold my wings and meditate  
calmly when I am overwhelmed and astounded by  
the unexpected and the calamitous. Teach me to  
pursue my way undaunted by stunning failures.  
Let me sit at your six feet and learn truest wis-  
dom !"

*The light the  
only thing  
worth while*

Hope you are having a bully time, Marnissima,  
but it is darned lonesome here without you.

Your loving  
BRUDDER.

P.S.

Excuse pencil. My fountain pen was profoundly  
affected when it discovered my plot to write to  
you ; and it wept tears of darkness, then became  
comatose. How like mankind is a fountain pen,  
the emptier it is, the more it gives down ! Apho-  
rism ! Ha ha ! Mine, ho ho !

*The human  
qualities of  
the fountain  
pen*

J. S.

JUNE 18 :— Another comforting service in the  
dear, plain old meeting house. Gerritt spoke

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

even better than last week. He came home  
*The wicked* with us to dinner and fitted into our quiet  
*tip of the* First Day afternoon with rare tact. But I  
*serpent's tail* was too conscious of that wee tip of the ser-  
pent's tail to be quite as free with him as I  
was before ; but I think he did not realize  
that I was different in my' attitude towards  
him.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A BEWILDERING REVELATION

JUNE 20TH:—Keats calls the private ideas of a man about his own life, his *Weeding a philosophic back-garden* philosophic back garden. I went out in mine to-day and pulled up a suspicion by the roots and planted in its place a broad, humorous smile. Heaven be praised for a sense of humor! It helps when all else fails.

Gerritt came over this morning and invited me to go for a drive in a low old phaeton drawn by a stout old horse which drove herself, and would brook no interference from the one who held the reins. I had qualms about going with him; but I went because I did not know what else to do, my usual reason for doing unwise things.

We took the valley road; there was not enough breeze to flutter the weakest-minded

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

poplar leaf; the bobolinks were gurgling ecstatically in the meadows, and the orioles wove their gold in and out the roadside tapestries. My companion looked at me approvingly and said :

“Marian Lee, I like to see thee in white ; *Kindly treatment* that soft hat of thine looks like a bit of yonder cloud plucked from the sky, and is vastly becoming to thee. Life has patted thy face with gentle hands into fair roundness, instead of writing all over it with lines of care.”

“I fear thee finds my face lacking in character, then,” ventured I.

“By no means ; not for years have I seen a face that so attracts me because of the character delineated in it as does thine.”

“Gerritt, thee must not talk so to me ; it is not good for me to listen to such flattery,” I rejoined with some severity.

“What an utter barrier is worldly conventionality,” he answered with an impatient frown. “A man and a woman may walk together arm in arm and be good friends and yet there is between them always a Chinese *The Chinese wall of social conventions*

## A BEWILDERING REVELATION

wall that holds them forever apart. Let us be brave and understand each other Marian!"

"Very well, thee begin," I replied.

"Thee is afraid of me, Marian Lee."

"No, I am not," I denied hotly.

"Yes, thee is afraid I will fall in love with thee."

"I fear thee has taken leave of thy senses, to talk like that," I asserted with spirit, but with guilty conscience.

"Now thee is not honest," he averred, looking at me grimly.

"Well, what is thee going to do about it," I demanded.

"I invited thee to go with me this morning on purpose to tell thee something which will make thee honest with me and make thee trust me and thyself and our relations so that we may be happy playmates as of old."

*Gerritt  
batters the  
wall down*

"I am listening, declare the magic words," I replied, with a bravado which the occasion seemed to require.

"I belong heart and soul to another woman. And though thee has a dimple in thy cheek and wears a beguiling hat, I could not if I

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

tried give thee more than a playmate's honest admiration and affection."

"I did not know thee was to be married," I faltered, for his announcement took my breath away, it was so unexpected.

*A declaration of love for another woman* "I shall never be married. But for twenty long years I have belonged to a woman, and I could no more sunder the ties which bind me to her, than could this world of ours deflect from its orbit. It is a long story, Marian, and I do not mean to tell it to thee, nor to any one else. She whom I love is peerless, the one woman above all others to those fortunate enough to know her. She is beautiful and wise and good, and so clever that there is interest and fascination in her least word.

*The miracle of love* "When I first loved her I was most unworthy, but through loving her I have grown somewhat, I trust. A man must have a steadfast purpose to thread his deeds upon, like beads upon a string, and my purpose has been to become worthy of her love which she gave me unquestioningly. Her love wrought a miracle in me. I stood before her with only

## A BEWILDERING REVELATION

a broken loaf and one little fish, and lo ! I had basketfuls for the multitude."

"But why did thee not marry her ?" I cried, trying to fit his revelation to ordinary experience.

"There was a barrier, and we could not marry ; but thee must not think that it was because she belonged to another man—she could never, under any circumstances become involved in a dishonorable relation. But though the barrier still holds us asunder, I am happy in loving her. At first it was not so ; there were years full of loneliness and, I fear, recklessness ; but there came a harvest after the harrowing, though I sometimes resented the thought that the harvest should be rich when I suffered so keenly for its cultivation. But in the end I was glad to yield any harvest to a world in which she lives."

*The cost of  
the harvest*

"If you still love each other, after all these years, the barrier has no right to be there. If I were a man in thy place I would sweep that barrier out of existence unless I could leap over it," I declared with heat.

"That would be unworthy, and perhaps

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

not for the best," he answered thoughtfully.

*A satisfying knowledge* "The grooves of our lives are set, and I think it is better as it is. I know I love and that I am loved and the knowledge satisfies my heart. What can my material life possibly have to do with my love! If I wore upon my life by chafing at its logical and natural development, or by evolving sorrow where there is no sorrow, then would I sin against her, myself and humanity. What folly to mix the distinctly independent affairs of the spiritual and material worlds! All the selfish yearning and desire of my earlier years have come to seem as but a tattered garment which temporarily obscured what is beautiful, true and everlasting." As he said this he turned upon me his glowing, magnetic eyes, and his face was transfigured. It is a beautiful face, always; but then it radiated spiritual light, and looked as must the face of an *The face transfigured* angel. While still holding me spellbound with his gaze, he went on in a voice of thrilling sweetness:

"Oh, Marian Lee, I am happy every day of my life! I look at and bless the sky, be

## A BEWILDERING REVELATION

it blue or gray, because it holds within its arch her whom I love, and me, loving her. I bless the earth, because somewhere it responds to her footsteps. No matter how hard the day or burdensome the care, the consciousness of her and her love gives me courage to go on. I lean against her love when I am weary and it supports me; when I fall, I reach up and lift myself again to my feet by the strength of it. Those who depend upon daily association for the life of love know little of its true strength, or its power over the human soul. If I never saw her nor heard from her again, it would be just the same. She and I belong to eternity and therefore must our love be eternal."

*The paltry  
love of mere  
propinquity*

"Does thee never, never, see her?" I asked breathlessly. A fleeting smile hovered about his lips, as if in tender memory, and he said in a dreamy tone as if to himself:

"Every year when the lilies-of-the-valley bloom, we two make a pilgrimage to a little town nestled by a stream in a beautiful valley, and there amid the fragrance of the exquisite lily bells, we have one day together."

*Lilies-of-the-  
valley*

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

At the mention of these fateful flowers, I grew dizzy ; my head and my heart were in a confused whirl. Could it be this man instead of Tom Carroll? I tried to think, but I was too dazed. I knew that Ma Belle had some acquaintance with Gerritt Howland. I knew also that, only a short time since, she suddenly made a short visit to a friend in western New York. I remembered that she had in previous years made similar visits to this friend ; but my knowledge of the friend and the town was vague. Ma Belle has a way of forefending curiosity concerning things which she would rather keep secret, by making the matter so smoothly commonplace that there is no point upon which curiosity may impinge.

The more clearly I was able to think about *A breathless discovery* it all, the firmer became the conviction that this man was her lover, and what she had said about my acquaintance with him was the simple truth and not a shining lie. And yet, so utterly had I given myself over to the belief that Tom belonged to her in the truest, deepest way that I could not at once divest

## A BEWILDERING REVELATION

myself of it. I was incoherent and mostly silent during the remainder of the drive, but *A tangent sympathy* I slipped my hand into Gerritt's alongside the rein, and thus showed him my sympathy and trust. As I left him I said :

"I thank thee, Gerritt, for telling me this, and I honor thee with all my heart and soul."

"Thank thee, playmate," he replied. "I am glad I have won thee back again, though I had to show thee my scars to accomplish it."

"Yes, and I have to-day discovered that a halo may emanate from scars that shine," I *Scars that shine* said softly, and we bade each other good-bye with a long, warm hand-clasp.

When I went into the house, I wished to escape from sight in order to think it all over and try to realize what it all meant to me, but Aunt Sylvia called me upstairs to the garret where she was overhauling trunks. She had found there a pretty pink muslin dress of Aunt Emily's, which was made in a fashion very like that in vogue at the present time ; she was quite excited over her find and insisted on trying it on me at once ; I was *A gratuitous blush* grateful that her attention was focussed on a

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

pink dress rather than on a pink face, for I somehow felt as guilty as if Gerritt Howland had confessed the love which I feared he would, instead of the love which I never suspected. Aunt Sylvia attributed the flush in my cheeks to the becoming color of the dress; she declared the fit perfect and that Maria should launder this treasure trove at once so that I could wear it during my visit. She did not need to explain how it was that rose-colored garb should please Quaker eyes. I always knew that Aunt Emily's worldly gowns were as great a delight to Aunt Sylvia as they were to the owner.

*A Friendly  
weakness*

## **CHAPTER XXIX**

### **SOME VERY SATISFACTORY LETTERS**

**J**UNE 21ST:—Dear Idol, three letters came to-day, each quite characteristic of its writer, and all of them giving evidence that my flight to this delectable land was for the good of others as well as for my own spiritual refreshment. Even Joe and father may profit somewhat by my absence since I can make them happier than ever when I return to them; my perplexities for the past months have alienated my attention from my very own family. Here is Joe's letter:

**DEAR MARNIE:**

The June-bug tactics are winning the game. Millie has not said 'yes' as yet; but her 'no' is reiterated diminuendo. She is surely capitulating, after having spread a stiff brand of agony over yours truly for the past three months.

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

If you stay away very much longer, the pater and I will both get married or else take to the tall grass ; we need feminine influence to brace us up. If there is any way in which I can stimulate your interest in your forlorn men-folk, just let me know and I will be at it.

Your loving, lonesome

JOSEPH STILLMAN, Esq.

I confess I dreaded to open the letter from  
*Not even a gravestone* Theodore Morris ; when one buries some things, one would rather that the earth were stamped down above them, and that there should never be any sign of them anywhere or any more. On the whole, though, the letter is a relief ; I think you will see why.

### MARIAN :

Since your letter came I have been trying to realize what it means. That I have failed in gaining the greatest desire of my life must be somehow my own fault. I felt so sure of winning you at first ; later, I grew to doubt myself and my power to make you happy.

*A far more satisfactory friend than lover* Had you been here, I might have pleaded with you to give me more time before you decided. But after these days of thinking it over, I believe I owe it to you to accept your decision as final.

Do not stay away on my account. Come back

## SOME VERY SATISFACTORY LETTERS

soon and I will promise to be to you a more successful and satisfactory friend than I have been lover.

Yours faithfully,

THEODORE.

I think this letter shows plainly that he is conscious of his feelings toward Hilda, and that he has been fighting them down because of loyalty to me. Hilda's letter confirms this impression, and I think you will agree with me that the near future holds great happiness for her ; she says :

*Happiness  
on the  
horizon*

DEARLY BELOVED :

I venture to break in on your rest with the statement that we are desolate without you. I went over to your house last evening ; your pa's hair was standing on end because he had been running his fingers through it trying to think up means of placating Maggie and Mary who had been quarrelling ; he was wearing his dressing gown down stairs and had been having interviews with students while thus arrayed. Cigar ashes were liberally distributed over the study table. Joe was smoking with his heels elevated to the top of your best mahogany chair; and both allowed that you had best come home immediately if you would prevent the complete demoralization of your entire establishment.

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

If you could see the forlorn way your devoted

*Hilda elucidates the situation*  
knight, Mr. Morris, prowls around, you would feel a tug at your heart strings, if perchance your heart has any strings attached to it. I am doing my prettiest to console him; yesterday I took him for a long walk over South hill. He is a sympathetic chap to be out of doors with, is n't he? We are practicing like mad almost every evening on some new music, so that we may give you the concert of your life when you get back. I talk to him about

*A very discreet young man*  
you, making praiseful and therefore unveracious remarks anent your appearance and charzter, and he answers—not one word. He simply looks far away, and says nothing.

I hope you are having a beautiful time, and that you are getting the much-needed rest. I trust you will come back to us soon with verve radiating like a nimbus from your blessed person.

Devotedly and lovingly,  
**HILDA.**

Most Discreet of Confessors! I will admit that the way T. M. has of never speaking of his own private experiences is a comfort to me now. I blush with contrition when I remember how I once complained to you about his steadfast defence of his own preserves. I know now, and I rejoice that I do

## SOME VERY SATISFACTORY LETTERS

know, that he will never by word nor sign reveal to Hilda the experience which lies between him and me. His lips are clamped tight for all eternity. Heaven be praised !

Some men, usually reliable, are led in the first flush of loving, to talk freely of past loves for the sake of the last love ; not so much for her edification as for the comfort of talking about intimate things with her. Rarely does such confession justify itself, or lead to aught but the later undoing of him who confesses. If he does not marry the woman to whom he has detailed these intimate experiences, he has reason to be sorry that she knows so much ; and if he does marry her, then all the more does he have reason to be sorry that she knows so much.

Women are still more prone than men to break this seal of secrecy which the honorable would seem bound to keep intact, since such confessions always involve two. Fortunately, women have been more or less protected from this temptation to treason, because of the reluctance of men to become their confessors. Nothing bores a man so much as to listen to

CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL  
a woman talk about a love of which he himself is not the sole object.

JUNE 22D:—This evening after Aunt and Uncle had gone to call on a convalescing neighbor, Gerritt Howland came. His face was more eloquent than ever as I gave him both my hands in greeting; for I was very glad to see him, since I had come to the determination to tell him what I knew. So with a little catch in my breath because of my excitement and temerity, I began without preface or warning.

*In modas res* “Gerritt, I know who she is; only a little time ago she told me her side of the story for the sake of helping me in a crisis of my own life. I was so stupid the other day, not to know that it was she when thee was telling me of her, for every word thee said of her was true.”

“Yes, Marian, I knew it,” he answered with *A mutual love* an illuminating smile. “I did not speak to thee of her wonderful letters which come to me every month of the year, keeping me close to her life and giving me the sustaining com-

## SOME VERY SATISFACTORY LETTERS

fort which I need in my arduous work with my fellow-men. Her last letter told me of her confession to thee ; and I was very glad, for I think it will be a comfort to her to speak of her inner life to thee whom she loves more than any other woman."

"I can understand now how true was all thee said yesterday ; for it would mean more *Hidden springs* to any man to be truly loved by her than it would to be married to any other woman in the whole world. I have no words to express my own adoration of her. It almost makes my heart stop beating when I think of what thee and thy love have meant to her all these years. I have always felt that she drew her life from hidden springs, and now I am beginning to comprehend."

A silence full of feeling fell, not between us but encompassing us around and holding us near to each other because both our hearts were turned toward *her*. After a time I went on, hesitatingly, fearing lest I might not be saying the right word :

"I believe that she needs thee and needs thy presence more during these later years

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

since she has not been so strong. I feel this  
*A deep-laid scheme* deeply as I look back over the past year in  
the light of my new knowledge. And I have  
dared to dream during the past twenty-four  
hours, that, through me, she may have thee  
with her more. Thee shall often be my guest,  
if I can have my way, and thus give her more  
of the companionship for which I know she  
yearns."

"We shall see, dear little schemer, we shall  
see!" he replied tenderly, though enigmati-  
cally. And then the sound of approaching  
voices told us that our talk was at an end.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE DAWN OF A JUNE DAY AND A LAST CONFESSiON

JUNE 23D:—To-day came another letter! However many times I read it, I cannot comprehend all it means. Teach me, I pray you, its reality.

#### MARIAN:

Last evening I spent with Madam Lee and she told me something which has shaken me to the *His letter* foundation. That you should seriously consider marrying again is almost beyond my powers of conception. That you should hesitate a moment in giving his *cong's* to this presuming young Apollo (confound him!) gave me the shock of my life.

Marian, I fear I have been blind and a fool; but thanks to Madam Lee, I am just beginning to see. I fear I have always loved you, dear, since those days when you, a poor little broken-hearted creature turned to me for help and comfort. I will speak plainly Marian, at the risk of hurting

## CONFESIONS TO A HEATHEN IDOL

you: I was Paul's dearest friend; and, because he was dead, I could not feel that I had any more right to win the love of his wife than if he had been living.

*A sacrifice to loyalty* During all these years I have lived on, taking only what I thought was right from his mother and his wife, giving up the dearest wish of a man's heart for wife and home, because I could not give to another what I might not give to you. Sometimes I have felt in you the possibility of giving to me what I longed for; at such times I have fought for self-control and there have been days and weeks when I remained away from you in order to get strength to be with you again without betraying myself and him.

*Lilies-of-the-valley* Last night, Paul's mother brought me to judgment. She believes I have done you wrong because I have not offered to you the love which is yours despite myself, and the protection and devotion which I long to give you. Dear, I do not even remember how long I have consciously loved you thus; but there is in my desk a withered bunch of flowers tied with a purple ribbon, which you wore one night fifteen years ago, and which fell at my feet for me to treasure because it had been so near to you.

That you have looked upon the matter very differently and probably more sanely than have I, is shown by the fact that you have considered the

## A LAST CONFESSION

possibility of marrying again. Marian, do you not know in your heart of hearts that you belong to me now? You are mine by all that is sacred—by all the denied longing of these many years. My heart demands you every moment, and I am coming to you to give to you, if you will deign to take him, the man who has done you wrong while trying to do right.

T. L. C.

My Confessor, how am I to orient myself again with happiness! For many years I have stanchly faced loss and loneliness but I find myself afraid and bewildered in the presence of great joy. I cannot even dream what to-morrow will bring.

JUNE 24TH :—Last night I slept only spasmodically. I heard the shriek of the midnight train from the city and it sent a thrill quivering into my fitful dream. This morning I heard the first notes of the bird concert and I arose and plaited my hair, girl-fashion and tied it with a rose-red ribbon; and I put on the rose-colored dress which was Aunt Emily's. There was no hue but *couleur de rose*

CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL  
that was fitting to wear at the dawn of this  
morning.

I stole out of the house, across the dewless  
*The* grass and hurried down the road in the dim  
*dawn-wind* light. I was restless and found sweet com-  
panionship in the dawn-wind, which is  
different from any other wind that blows.  
It comes in the faint light of the morning  
when the world is so expectantly still, and by  
its presence heralds the coming of the day.  
It does not stir the branches, but it sets the  
leaves astir. It is the very essence of unrest ;  
it goes in and out the leaves turning them  
white-side out as if in search of something  
beneath them. It is fitful, shaking one tree  
into a blur of whiteness and ignoring its  
nearest neighbors. The sound of it is a  
whisper of restlessness ; and as it reaches the  
ear, the heart responds with a thrill of  
inquietude over the immutable law of  
awakening.

I passed on with this companion of my mood,  
the vagrant dawn-wind, and tried to unite  
myself to the whole awakening world, so that  
I might be large enough to comprehend the

## A LAST CONFESSION

joy which was coming to me. Was it your occult influence, or sheer prescience that sent me hurrying on eager feet, under the rosy light of the dawn, to meet my love? I know not; but out of the fleeing shadows he came, and as he drew near he cried :

“ Is it a vision of a dream or is it Marian ? ”

I said naught, but went unto him ; and while he held me close, he let his heart overflow in two syllables, the beginning words on the page of my new book of life.

*The dawn*

JUNE 25TH :—Dear Idol, I confess in meter to-night.

I fain would be June's own interpreter,  
And put in words the soul that underlies  
The glorious green that stretches to the skies,                          *June*  
Enfolding hill and vale as if it were                                  *regnant*  
A sentient mantle, wove from threads astir  
With throbbing life. 'T is June which deifies  
All earth and makes us Pantheists, likewise  
Awakes the poet in each worshipper.

O glinting leaf with vagrant breeze atilt !  
Thy joyous thrill I fain would incarnate.

## CONFessions TO A HEATHEN IDOL

O swaying bird that sends the blithe June lilt  
From tip of fine-spun larch ! show me the gate  
Which leads from heart to voice. Teach an thou  
wilt  
How I may too great joy to song translate.

SEPTEMBER 1ST, 1906 :—One year ago to-day

*An ambushed pathway* I began my confessions to you, O Idol ! And no one would ever guess by looking at the two of us that we had traversed so intimately together the year's ambushed pathway. And now despite my former tenet that Noah's fatuity was responsible for second marriages, I am married again. But you, above all others, Dear Confessor, will understand that getting married to Tom is quite a different matter from getting married to anybody else whomsoever. Probably, taking matters by and large, Old Noah was justified.

This day I make my last confession to you.

*A last confession* I feel that before I abandon you, I should like to tell you that love is widely and deeply comfortable when one knows how to take it. The *noblesse oblige* of it is not hard outside pressure, but is instead, an inside power of

## A LAST CONFESSION

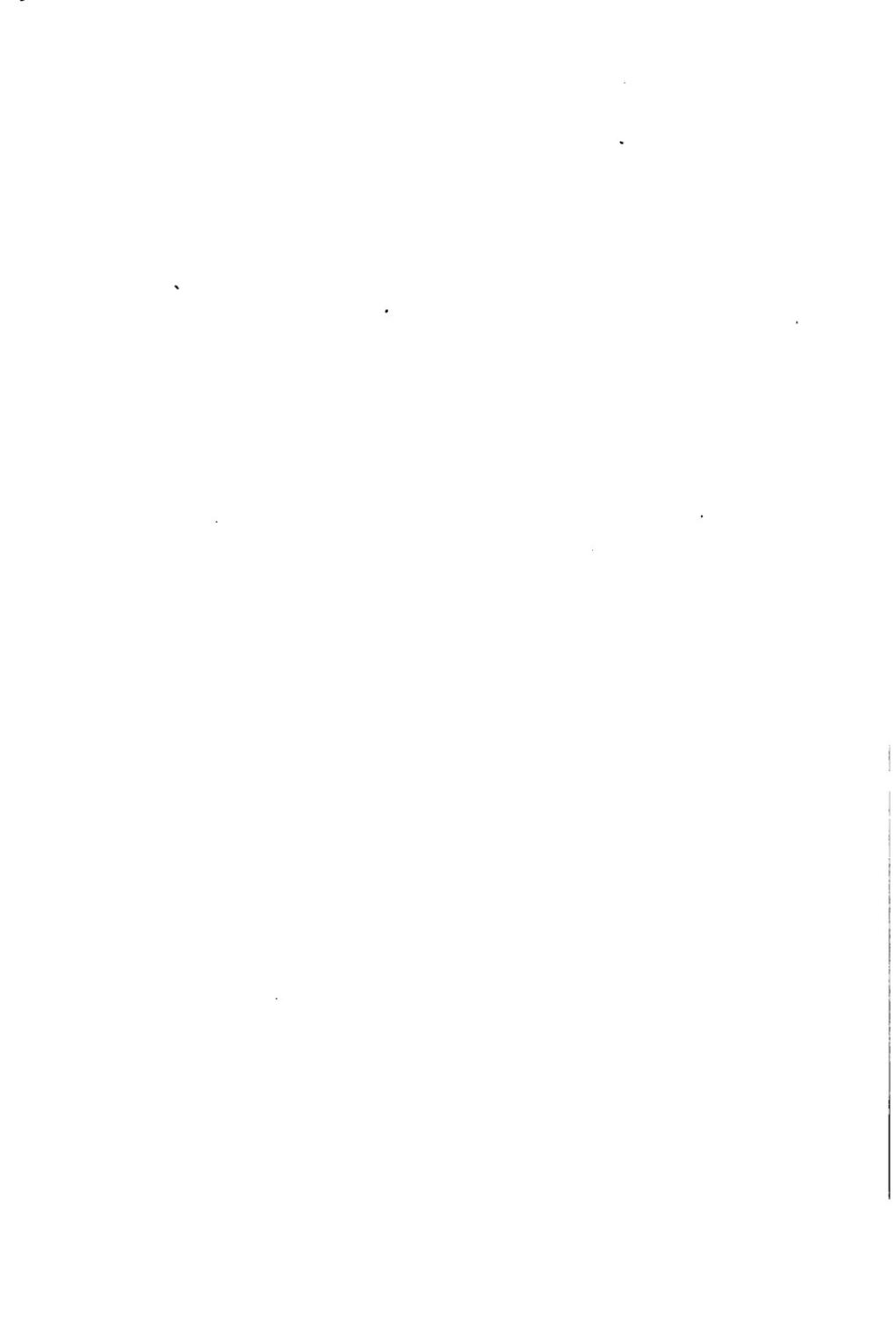
growing—a natural and therefore an unconscious uplifting.

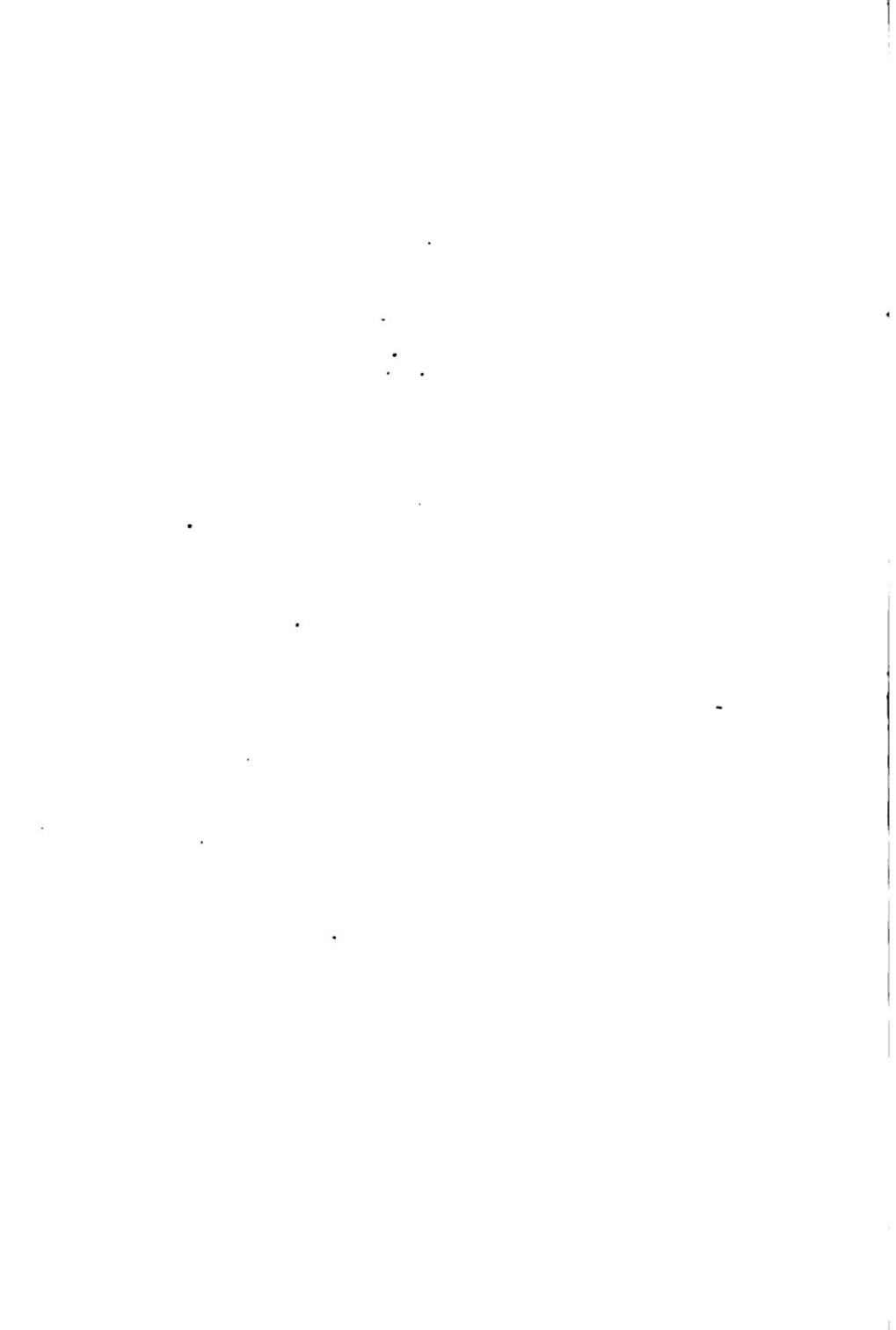
I do not cease my confessions because I believe that I shall have nothing of deepest interest to confess. Far from it! Married life is always the beginning and not the end of interesting and perplexing experiences. But let me whisper something to you, Wise One: When a woman is married she confesses to no one, not even to a broad-minded teakwood idol. The right kind of a wife never confesses even to herself. That is a fundamental part of true marriage—never confessing. You may see with those uplifted eyes of yours what you will of my present all-embracing happiness, or of my future efforts to keep it intact. See what you may, and set me a good example by smiling on and on despite inner pangs; and above all remember this, my last word to you: Life with all its blisses and sorrows, its ecstasies and commonplaces is mightily worth while to us mortals, because, bad or good, it is ever and always so surprisingly interesting.

*The reason a wife needs no confessor*

*Why life is so perennially good*







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